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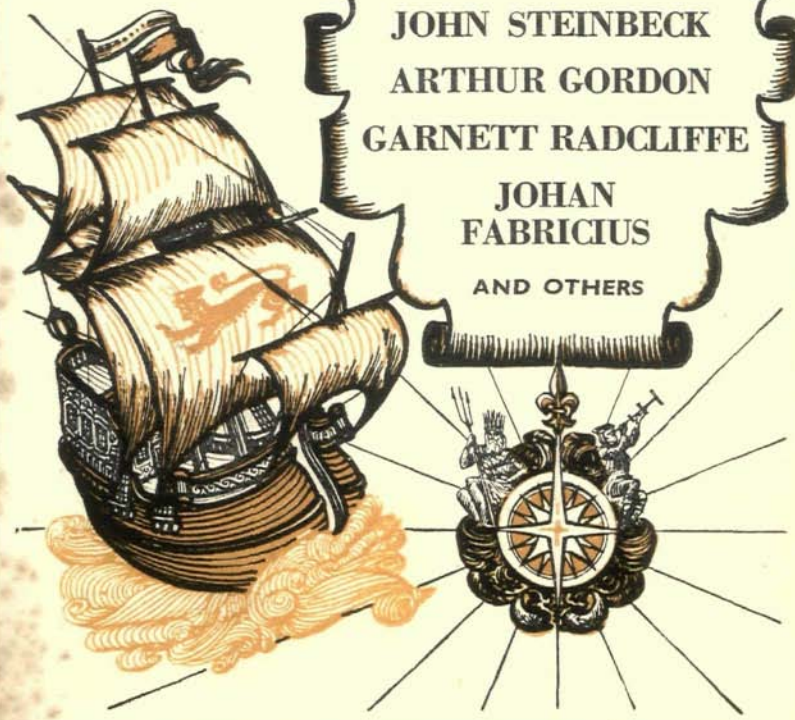

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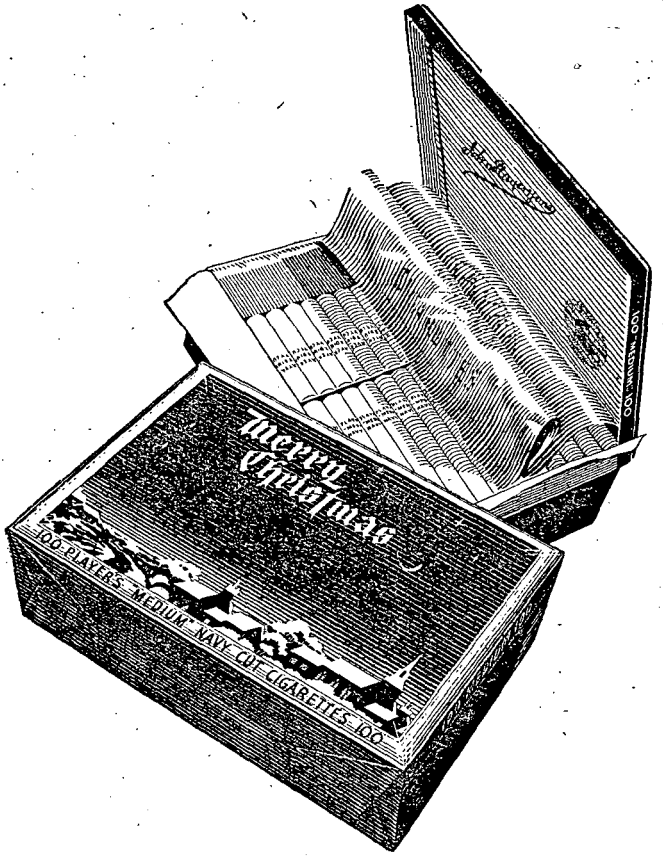

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ARGOSY

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Bronze Music

THE first bell is silver,
And breathing darkness I think only of the long scythe of time.
The second bell is crimson,
And I think of a holiday night, with rockets
Furrowing the sky with red, and a soft shatter of stars.
The third bell is saffron and slow,
And I behold a long sunset over the sea
With wall on wall of castled cloud and glittering balustrades.
The fourth bell is colour of bronze,
I walk by a frozen lake in the dun light of dusk:
Muffled crackings run in the ice,
Trees creak, birds fly.
The fifth bell is cold clear azure,
Delicately tinged with green:
One golden star hangs melting in it,
And towards this, sleepily, I go.
The sixth bell is as if a pebble
Had been dropped into a deep sea far above me . . .
Rings of sound ebb slowly into the silence.

CONRAD AIKEN

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IT HAPPENED IN SPAIN

All around them the night was full of singing fire

by ARTHUR GORDON

THEY sat at a circular iron table in front of the café, Cliff Morgan and his beautiful wife. Somewhere across the plaza their hired car and driver waited for them, but there was no hurry. They could waste an hour and still make Gibraltar before dark.

He shook his head once more at the persistent vendor of lottery tickets, hovering hopefully in the flat white sunshine. He held up two fingers, and their waiter went at once to the shadowy bar along the rear of the café. There, a shapeless woman in black poured two more manzanillas. The waiter brought the tiny glasses and placed them on the table.

"*Gracias*," Cliff murmured.

He was a tall, sunburnt man in his early forties, relaxed and confident. From behind his sun-glasses he watched his wife as she smoothed her gloves and placed them on the paper-bound book of short stories she had picked up in Madrid. She looked up suddenly and smiled at him. "A peseta for them."

"Oh," he said, "I was just thinking about life."

"What about it?"

He nodded at the book. "How it differs from fiction, for example."

"Is it so very different?"

He hesitated, not sure of his thoughts. "I think so. Fiction has to make a clear-cut point, as a rule. So the events must be carefully arranged in dramatic form. The characters do certain things, and certain results follow, logically and smoothly. Whereas in life—"

"Yes?"

"The things you *don't* do are just as important as the things you do. Perhaps more important."

"Negative causality, you mean?"

"Something like that. But the results of *not doing* are seldom so immediate and so obvious as the results of *doing*. Perhaps that's why fiction has such universal appeal. The pattern is nice and clear; it's not blurred."

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She said, frowning a little, " Don't you see any pattern in life? "

He twisted the stem of his wineglass, looking past her down the placid street, which ended where the curving wall of the bullring sliced the sky.

He sat there with the question hanging in the luminous air before him, remembering.

He had been twenty-two that April, strong as a young lion and about as heedless. His student companions had grown tired of Spain, and pushed on, restless, determined not to waste a moment of their vacation. But he had stayed behind, caught by some strange affinity with the dusty olive groves, the arid mountains, the houses white as bleached bones against the fierce red earth and fiercer sky.

He stayed, drunk with the colour and languor of it after the grey Oxford winter, a day here, two days there, aimless, purposeless, and completely happy.

Near the end, running short of both time and money, he had gone down from Granada to this little coastal town, on his way to Gibraltar and the boat back to England. By then, his Spanish was better than fair. He made the usual inquiries about a *posada*. Ten pesetas daily was all he could afford. More than that he didn't have.

And so he came to the Casa Blanca, a crumbling guest-house overlooking the ancient sea.

There was only one other guest, a Mr. Custis from Toronto, strangely furtive and apologetic, with sparse sandy hair and pleading blue eyes. And Linares, the owner, tall and sombre, with exquisite manners and a persistent cough. And his wife, too fat too soon, in the way of Spanish women. And, incredibly, Maria.

He saw her first at dinner, the meal Spaniards eat late and at leisure. A shadow in the kitchen at first, a silhouette moving across the open door. A servant, he thought vaguely, as he tried to make conversation with Mr. Custis and found it heavy going. And then she had come quietly into the dining-room and sat down opposite him, head lowered a little, eyes downcast.

He forgot what he was saying to Mr. Custis. He forgot the spoonful of soup halfway to his lips. He stared at the girl and kept on staring, although he knew that it was bad manners, that Linares, with all his pride and sensitivity, might easily resent it. He tried to look away, but he couldn't.

She was slender and not very tall. She was wearing a white blouse, and in the open V of it a small gold cross hung on a chain. Her hair was shining black and parted in the middle. She wore

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no make-up, but her mouth was like pink coral and her skin had the dusky, translucent quality of amber. She glanced up once at Cliff, and he saw that her eyes were not black, nor even very dark, but a tawny colour, almost topaz. There was no coquetry in them, only a faint interest and perhaps a distant sadness. There was a stillness about her, as if she were listening for something. She was about nineteen, exquisite, and untouched.

Linares said gravely, "This is my niece and ward, Maria Perez. She does not, I am sorry to say, speak English." He changed to his courtly Castilian. "Maria, this is Señor Morgan. He will be with us for two or three days."

She murmured the conventional phrase. Her voice was low but very clear, and it seemed to Cliff that he heard it not only with his ears but with all his suddenly awakened senses.

"Maria's father was killed in the rioting when the monarchy was overthrown." Linares turned his head aside and coughed his dry cough. "Her mother entered a convent, and Maria came to us. She is like our own daughter now."

"You are lucky," said Mr. Custis. "I have no daughter, not even an adopted one. As a matter of fact—" he looked around in a pleased way, as if he took a certain delight in his misfortune—"I have no one. No one at all!"

"No one is ever entirely alone," Linares said. "We Spaniards have a proverb . . ."

The meal went on, formalized, interminable. Cliff kept his eyes on his plate; he made himself exchange banalities with Mr. Custis. But all the while, he felt it growing inside him, felt it pouring into the room like an electric current, charging the atmosphere until it seemed impossible the others could remain unaware of it. All the languor and aimlessness of the past few weeks were gone; a tremendous aliveness had come upon him.

He knew he wanted the impossible, or the almost impossible, and this goaded him to boldness. He said to his host as the meal ended, "Would it be all right if I asked Maria to show me the garden?"

He had seen the garden already, from the window of his room, a long rectangle of uneven ground, sloping steeply to the stony beach. It was unkempt and overgrown, with stunted orange trees here and there and crumbling trellised arches, where rambler roses climbed and wistaria hung. But a garden, still.

Linares hesitated, rolling his napkin and pushing it through the ivory ring. Cliff kept his eyes on the Spaniard, waiting to see whether courtesy would triumph over caution.

Linares coughed again, then put his napkin down. "Maria," he said in Spanish, "be so good as to show Señor Morgan the

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garden. But stay within call. It is possible that Don Pedro will come to take a glass of wine with us."

From behind the door the girl took a black lace shawl. She put it over her head and drew it around her shoulders. "When you are ready, Señor."

They went out and walked down a path dimly outlined by white stones. There was no moon; the stars looked misty and pale. Once their shoulders touched, and Maria drew away quickly.

"My uncle used to have a gardener," she said nervously. "But not any more. It is a pity. The garden—"

Cliff said, "I like it the way it is."

He stopped, and she stopped, too. They were lost in a tangle of sweet-scented vegetation. Only the upper storey of the house was visible, the white frames of its two dormer windows glimmering faintly. It was so quiet he could hear her breathing, light and quick, as if she had been running. He had the queer feeling that time was being condensed, that life was streaming past them, fulfilling itself at a tremendous pace, that she, too, felt this urgency and would understand anything he said or did.

He put his hand on her arm. Through the lace of the shawl her skin felt warm and sweet, almost as if his fingers had a sense of taste. He felt her trembling, or perhaps it was his own hand shaking. He said, "I like the way you are, too, Maria."

She made a little negative gesture. "Please," she said.

Slowly he removed his hand, knowing now what he wanted to know, and being content with that knowledge for a little while.

He said, "It is very beautiful here, I think. On the roof outside my window there are roses climbing, and I can look down at the garden and out across the sea."

"I know," she said. "Sometimes I wake up early and watch the sun rise. And the moon, too, comes—"

He said, quickly, "Then your window must be next to mine?"

She turned away from him.

He had been holding back another question, and now he let it go: "Who is Don Pedro?"

She drew the shawl tighter. "A man."

He felt something tighten inside him. "Just a man?"

"He is the man I am to marry."

He clenched his fist, then spread the fingers wide in the darkness. At last he said, "*Felicitaciones.*"

She did not acknowledge this. "And you," she said, "you have a sweetheart? You must have one somewhere."

He thought of Karen then, really thought of her for the first time for days. Thought of the old, friendly house, the great live

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oaks melancholy with moss, the slow river shining in the sun.

"I suppose so," he said. "But she is far away."

"You will marry her, though."

Abrupt as a slammed door, anger jolted through him. "If you are promised to another man, why did your uncle let you come out here with me?"

He saw her shoulders move. "He knew I would tell you."

"How does he know I won't try to make love to you anyway?"

"Perhaps," she said, "he thinks you are a man of honour."

He had no time to reply to this. From the house he heard Linares calling them.

"We must go back," Maria said. "Don Pedro is here."

He said, childishly, "I don't want to see him."

"As you like."

But she had not gone ten paces before he hurried after her, telling himself that if he saw this other man, saw with his own eyes that the girl was happy, well matched, this hunger would go away.

He was wrong. Don Pedro was a courteous man, like all Spaniards, soft-spoken, well-dressed, not without charm. But he was old, old, old. His hair was silver; so was his moustache. Under his dark eyes were many fine lines, shadowed with purple.

He bent over Maria's hand gracefully, spoke to her gently and with affection. Then, as Linares introduced them, he offered Cliff his hand. The bones were light and fragile, but his grip was firm and cool.

"I am honoured," he said in Spanish, but his dark eyes said much more. I know I am old, they said, but not so old as I seem to you. This has all been arranged most carefully in a manner you might find hard to understand. It is not ideal, perhaps, but it is a good arrangement, believe me, the best for all concerned.

He did not stay long. He drank a glass of Malaga, said good night, took his leave. An old man, still arrow-straight, but with a dryness upon him like fine dust.

Cliff put down his wine untouched. He did not look at Maria as she said good night to her uncle and Mr. Custis. When she had gone, he said, "I think I'll turn in."

Linares followed him into the hall, where a single light burnt dimly. "I trust you will rest well. My house is yours."

"Thank you," Cliff said, and started up the stairs.

"You did not drink your wine," Linares said. "Was there anything wrong with it?"

"No," said Cliff, looking down, "there was nothing wrong with it."

Linares was standing by the newel post, his face a pale blur in the semi-darkness. "He is a fine man," he said softly. "A good

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Catholic, the owner of two *bodegas*. His wife has been dead for many years. He will make Maria a good husband."

Cliff's hand tightened on the banister. "She doesn't love him!"

Linares took out his handkerchief and coughed into it twice. "Love is a luxury, my friend. Not everyone in this world can afford it."

"I disagree with you," Cliff said, and went up the stairs.

In his room, he sat on the bed. The room was small; the ceiling slanted sharply towards the single dormer window. The bed was in the only position where there was room for it, against the left-hand wall. In Maria's room, the bed would be against the right-hand wall. He listened. There was no sound.

He stood up, hesitated, went to the window. The casement opened outward; there was no screen. He pushed it fully open and looked out, leaning his weight on his hands. Fifteen feet away, jutting from the gently slanting roof, was Maria's window. The night air was warm and soft. But her casement was closed.

He turned back into the room, undressed, put out the light. Again he went to the window and knelt there, waiting. For half an hour he stayed there, but Maria's window did not open.

At last he stretched out on his bed. He rapped once softly on the wall. He rapped again, but there was no reply. He lay there for a long time, eyes wide open, staring into the darkness. After a while, he slept.

He woke early, with a sense of liberation and release. He lay for a while, listening to the birds, watching the fresh sunlight. When at last, cautiously, he thought of Maria, he was relieved to find that the frenzy seemed to have gone.

He dug some swimming-trunks out of his rucksack, put them on, went down the silent stairs and through the garden. He came to the rocky beach and hesitated. There, sitting cross-legged and facing the sunrise, was Mr. Custis. He was fully dressed except for his shoes and socks, which were beside him. He was humming cheerfully and counting his toes. When Cliff spoke to him, he did not answer, but nodded absently and went on, rapt and self-absorbed, with his game.

Warily, Cliff walked past him and plunged into the sea, but the water was cold and he did not linger. When he came out, Mr. Custis was gone.

As he went through the garden, dripping and still puzzled by his fellow boarder's behaviour, he saw Maria at her window, watching him. Rambler roses grew thick along the porch steps, and on a sudden impulse he picked one, put it between his teeth, swung himself onto the slanting roof. She drew back, but she

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did not close the window. He tossed the rose through it. "Good morning," he said.

She picked up the flower, smiling a little, and tucked it behind her ear. She looked fresh and lovely, and behind her in the little room, he could see her bed, just where he had visualized it, on the other side of the wall from his. But the fever that had tormented him seemed to be gone.

He climbed into his own room, dressed quickly, went downstairs. Linares was having breakfast. But there was no sign of Mr. Custis, and Cliff took advantage of this to ask about him.

"He is perfectly harmless," Linares said gravely, "but his mind sometimes grows very simple, like a child's. He was on a cruise ship that came here. Then the ship went away without him. He had no money and no friends. That was several months ago."

"You mean," said Cliff incredulously, "he doesn't even pay you? But how long will he stay?"

Linares shrugged. "As long as God wills," he said. He coughed gently and stood up. "I must go to Cordoba today. But I shall return tomorrow. Until then, eh?"

Faint and unbidden, a little flicker of excitement touched Cliff, and then was gone. "Until tomorrow," he said.

Calm and golden, now, the day lay ahead of him. He finished breakfast and waited until Linares had gone. Then he went to his room. He thought perhaps Maria would come to make his bed and tidy the room.

She did. He sat on the window-sill, finding pleasure in watching her perform her tasks. The rose was still in her hair. He thought involuntarily of Don Pedro, and winced. He said, "You kept your window shut last night, Maria. Are you afraid of the night air?"

She did not answer, but for a moment her hands were still.

He said, with a sincerity he was sure he felt, "Let's start all over again, Maria. Let's be friends."

She looked at him soberly. "Friends," she said. "Yes, I would like that."

He jumped down from the window-sill. "I have an idea. You take the day off and show me the town. I'll give you lunch somewhere, and dinner. We can—"

"Oh no!" She looked shocked. "I have my work to do. Besides, it would not be proper. My uncle would not approve."

"Your uncle isn't here." He felt the excitement again, stronger now, demanding and compelling. He touched her hand.

She moved away, towards the open door. She said in a low

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voice, " This afternoon, when my aunt takes her siesta, I might tell her I am going to the church. If you should happen to be there—" She hesitated—" But is it wise? "

He said, " Why shouldn't it be wise? "

He was at the church early. It was dark and cool, full of the smell of sandalwood and sanctity. Behind the altar was a Madonna by Murillo. He saw Maria come in at last, her shawl over her head. He waited while she said a prayer; then they went out together. Already the dusty shadows were beginning to lengthen. They walked through the quiet streets, looked at the sun-smitten monuments. They sat in a pavement café, where Cliff had a drink. He tried to persuade Maria to have one, but she would not. They went to a small museum, with many mediocre paintings and one very fine Zurbarán.

They walked down a narrow street where leather goods from Morocco were sold, and curios and Moorish knives and all sorts of jewellery. He saw Maria look wistfully at a bronze medallion, with a figure outlined in green enamel—the figure of a woman, oriental and graceful. The shopkeeper said it represented the Javanese goddess of the dance.

" I'll buy it for you, Maria," Cliff said impulsively.

Her eyes lighted for a moment; then she shook her head. " I could not accept it."

" I want you to have it," he said stubbornly, and bought it, although it was more than he could afford.

But when he offered it to her, she refused again, and when he tried to insist, she said sharply, " Save it for your girl in America!"

A coolness seemed to come between them. He put the medallion in his pocket. They walked back to the Casa Blanca, saying nothing until they came to the door. Then he said, with a kind of deliberate cruelty, " When are you being married? "

She did not look at him. " Soon," she said. " Very soon." And went quickly into the house.

She did not appear at dinner. Cliff waited, answering abruptly the gentle, inane remarks of Mr. Custis. He knew Maria was in the kitchen; he saw her silhouette through the open door. But she did not come to the table, and being thus denied, he felt again the almost intolerable hunger for the sight of her, the sound of her voice, the touch of her skin under the lace. It was stronger even than the night before. It was a longing, an emptiness, a desire beyond all reason. And he knew she felt it, too.

Then Mr. Custis did a surprising thing. He leaned over and put his hand on Cliff's arm. For a moment his eyes lost their blue vagueness; they were shrewd and penetrating and kind.

" You should leave here," he said. " It will be difficult, but

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you should go. Right away. Tonight." He pushed back his chair, went into the hall, and up the stairs.

The faint sounds from the kitchen ceased at last. Señora Linares came out, murmured a timid good-night. Cliff heard the stairs creak under her weight. He waited, but Maria did not come. After a while, he walked through the darkened dining-room and pushed open the kitchen door. "Maria," he said.

There was no answer. The kitchen was empty, but a door leading to the garden was open. Cliff stepped through it. Under one of the trellised arches, her white blouse a pale smear in the darkness, Maria was standing.

He went straight to her and took her in his arms. She did not resist him; her mouth was waiting for his. All around them, the night was full of singing fire. He kissed her eyes, her lips again, her throat. "Maria," he said, "Maria." And he used the Spanish phrase that means "I love you" or "I need you" or "I want you" or all three.

She gave a little moan and pushed him away and ran into the house. He followed her through the kitchen, but she fled up the stairs and into her room. When he reached her door, he heard the lock click.

He went into his room and stood in the darkness, waiting for the tumult in his brain to subside. After a while, he crossed to the window. He looked out, and as he looked, Maria's casement opened slowly and silently. There was no sound, no sign, but it stayed open.

He knew then that he had to make a choice, quickly, while there was still time. He could stay or he could go, but he could not stay and then go, conscienceless and free. It would not be fair. It would not be fair to Maria.

If he had been older or younger, the choice might have been easier. Younger, the fever might have burnt less fiercely. Older, the iron cage of idealism might have been less strong.

But he was neither young nor old, so he flung himself furiously against the invisible bars and succeeded only in bruising his spirit, in causing himself pain.

Finally he turned from the window. Into his rucksack, he crammed his few belongings. His hands were shaking as he took out his wallet, put money for two days' lodging on the bureau.

On the dim landing, he hesitated for a moment outside Maria's room, bent down, put the bronze medallion by the door. He went quickly down the stairs, out of the Casa Blanca. He looked back once. Suddenly he was running, running through the ghostly streets, running as if his life depended on it, his footsteps loud and desperate in the night . . .

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It all came back to him, clear and untouched under the thin, transparent varnish of time. Then it was gone, and there across the iron table in the golden sunlight sat Karen. Karen, his wife.

"A pattern in life?" he repeated slowly. "I don't know, really. Life's such a sleight-of-hand artist; now you see it, now you don't." They were silent for a while.

"It's a quaint little town," Karen said at last. "Did you come here on that Spanish vacation you had while you were at Oxford?"

"Yes," he said. "I spent a couple of days here."

She picked up her book and gloves. "Hadn't we better be moving on?"

He finished his wine. "I suppose so."

She stood up. "I'll disappear for a minute while you settle the bill. All right?"

"All right." He watched her go to the bar, ask directions in her faltering Spanish from the woman behind it, and vanish. He paid for the drinks, wandered into the street, and bought a lottery ticket from the tireless vendor.

Karen appeared, and they walked away, taking their time, shoulders touching now and then. He glanced at her once, with pride and affection. She was everything he desired in a woman.

"I almost bought myself a present," she said as they came to the car. "But she wouldn't sell it."

"Who wouldn't sell what?"

"The fat old girl behind the bar. She had a sort of medal hung round her neck. A lovely thing, really."

He stood quite still, one hand on the car door, and suddenly the past overpowered the present, and everything—the car, and Karen, and himself standing there—was unreal. In a flat, far-away voice he heard himself say, "Bronze, with a green figure on it."

Karen glanced at him curiously. "Why, no," she said. "Silver, and set with little amethysts . . . What's so funny?"

"Life," he told her. "You can never quite pin it down, can you?"

They were in the car now, sitting close together. Karen put her hand in his. "It's pretty good, though," she said contentedly.

The car was moving, the streets were falling away, the town was fading back into the past.

"Yes," Cliff Morgan said, "I like it. Just the way it is."

★ ★ ★

The love of humanity as such is mitigated by violent dislike of the next-door neighbour.

A. N. WHITEHEAD

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DEVIL'S KILL

What could have implanted such fear on the Askari's face

by GARNETT RADCLIFFE

WHILE he waited on the verandah outside the office where the Court of Inquiry was to be held, Captain Fenwick of the South Arabian Levies smoked cigarette after cigarette. He was in a state of nervous tension.

On Maskira, where the murder had happened, it had been all too easy to believe in devils. But this was Aden. He had been flown back to Aden to give evidence before a Court of Inquiry about a sentry who had been strangled on Maskira, which was just an island in the Oman Gulf off the coast of Oman. From this verandah he could see the cars on the Tarshyne Rock and the shipping in Steamer Bay, and everything was most civilized.

In the first report of the murder, which he had written on Maskira, he had stated what he believed to be the truth, that the sentry had been killed by a devil. He told himself now that he wouldn't change before the court even if it cost him his commission.

An Arab orderly came to tell him the court was ready. He threw away his cigarette, straightened his cap, and marched into the office where the court sat.

The court comprised three officers. Major Grant, Chief of the Protectorate Police, sat in the centre as president. Fenwick knew the Major by reputation. He was a small, bald-headed man with dark, restless eyes. They said of him in Aden that he was only happy when talking to Arabs in their own dialect.

The other two members of the court were subalterns of the Rock Artillery. Fenwick thought he could detect a sort of curious amusement in their sunburnt faces when they looked at him. A British officer who believed in devils! Of course, they had already read what he had written in his report of the murder, and they were judging him according to their lights.

Young know-alls! he thought, as he saluted the president.

The Chief of the Protectorate Police spoke: "Morning, Fenwick. Had a good trip back?"

"Very good, thank you, sir."

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"Take a chair, Fenwick, and smoke if you like. The other members of the court are Mr. Black and Mr. Culpepper, both of the Rock Artillery. They're unlucky. They've never sat on a Court of Inquiry before, and this one concerns a murder to which there is, apparently, no solution except the supernatural."

He was like a black-eyed little bird. Fenwick felt he was being pierced by those swift glances. He resisted an impulse to light a cigarette, and forced a smile.

"Probably there was an obvious solution I missed. I don't pretend to be a Sherlock Holmes."

The president grunted. With a nervous movement, he ruffled the leaves of the file.

After a pause he began to speak: "I declare the court open. We have been convened for the purpose of investigating the death of Hassan Khan Hassani, aged twenty-three, an askari of the South Arabian Levies. At approximately 0125 hours on the night of third-fourth April this year, he was found strangled while on guard outside the Portuguese fort on Maskira Island, off the Oman coast. As it happens, I know Maskira Island myself. It's just rock and sand—a nasty spot, eh, Fenwick?"

"I didn't really mind it until this happened," Fenwick said.

The Major's glance was like a knife thrust. Summing me up, Fenwick thought. Having read my report, he thinks I'm a bit round the bend. Let *him* solve the mystery, he thought. I've given the only possible solution.

The president was speaking again: "For the benefit of the members of the court who have never been on Maskira, I'll say a word about the fort itself. It's an immensely old square erection, standing on the beach within a hundred yards or so of the sea. Portuguese pirates built it in the thirteenth century, or so legend has it. Local Arabs believe it is haunted.

"Looking across the sea, you can clearly perceive the Oman mainland less than a mile away. There are dhows continually passing up and down the strip of water between Maskira and the mainland. Fishing dhows, pearl-poachers, gun-runners, slavers —all the riff-raff of the Persian Gulf use that route. And in this connection, I may mention now that inside the fort there's a huge quantity of weapons and ammunition left by the Americans. At the moment, the South Arabian Levies are looking after the stuff."

There was another pause while he hunted among papers. Then he resumed: "Now for the murder itself. When Hassan Khan Hassani was killed, he was on guard on the side of the fort nearest the sea. There were three other sentries, one for each of the other sides, but each sentry had a whistle by which he could

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summon assistance, if necessary. I may mention that the Oman rifle thieves are extremely clever. They can wriggle over sand like snakes, without leaving a trace. Do you agree, Fenwick?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet in this instance you are satisfied it was *not* a rifle thief who strangled your sentry?"

"I am, sir."

"All right. Well, I think you had better recount to the court all you know about what happened on the night of the murder."

Fenwick stood up. He could never forget that night if he lived to be a hundred. His mouth felt dry and his hands shook. *He* knew what it had been like on Maskira that night, but how could he convey the atmosphere to those men listening in a prosaic office in Aden?

He began to speak, his voice sounding harsh and strained in his own ears. "I was in my sleeping-quarters in the fort when Bimbashi Ali Hug Hassani woke me up . . ."

Yes, he'd been asleep, dreaming of his own garden in far-off England. Suddenly fear had come into the dream.

An urgent hand gripping his shoulder, and a breathless, urgent voice: "Sahib, come at once. One of the sentries has been killed. It is the devil's work."

So he was called back from his garden to the gritty reality of Maskira. By the expression on the face of his senior Arab officer he knew that something must be wrong, indeed. Bimbashi Ali Hug Hassani wasn't a man to panic easily. He was a soldier of twenty-five years' service who had seen battle and death and had earned medals for bravery.

Never had Fenwick seen him look as he looked then. His eyes were the eyes of a man who had witnessed horror and his voice trembled. "Sahib, come quickly. A devil has killed Hassan Khan Hassani."

Fenwick had risen sleepily. A greatcoat over his pyjamas, slippers on his feet. Together, they hurried down those dark, echoing passages of the fort, past the guardroom and to the entrance . . .

Outside, the scene had been one of great beauty. The sand lay like snow in the moonlight, the sea was a mirror, and on the distant mainland the Oman mountains showed black and jagged against the sky.

All was silent and peaceful, but fifty yards from the entrance, on the track where the sentries marched up and down, Hassan Khan Hassani lay on his back, his head flung back, his tongue protruding, and his eyes open as if he was staring at the moon.

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There was no sign of a struggle. His rifle, with the bayonet fixed, lay beside him. He had not attempted to draw his whistle from his breast pocket. It looked almost as if he had been too petrified with fear to offer any resistance.

But his expression! Fenwick had had to turn his eyes away. He had known and had liked the burly young Hassani. Only that afternoon they had played in the same game of football.

What could have implanted such fear on the askari's face? Men who died in violent combat with an enemy didn't look like that. Their faces were convulsed, snarling. Hassan Khan Hassani looked as if he had watched death approaching and had been powerless to fight or run.

As he stood gazing he heard the Bimbashi's fearful whisper: "He was slain by the *jinn* who haunts this fort!"

There was a silence when Fenwick had finished speaking. The president of the court had taken off his glasses and was polishing them.

One of the subalterns put a question: "You didn't find out what it was that actually strangled him?"

"No. From the marks on his neck it must have been something in the nature of a silk rope. The marks also indicated that the strangling had been done from in front."

"And the other sentries heard nothing?"

"Not a sound. Nor did the men in the guardroom, only fifty yards away, hear anything. He'd relieved the previous sentry in the normal way about half an hour before. Next thing anybody knew was when the Bimbashi went out to inspect the sentries and found him."

"You say there were no marks on the sand?" the subaltern asked.

"Absolutely nothing. I sent out a patrol at once to search the island, but they found no one. And there wasn't a dhow in sight. I'm sure he wasn't killed by a rifle thief. But if a rifle thief did kill him in some amazing way, why didn't he take the rifle?"

"Perhaps he was alarmed by something. You say there was no dhow, but isn't it possible for a man to swim to the mainland?"

"I don't think so. There's a strong current and the channel is infested with sharks."

"Still, that might be possible?" the subaltern insisted.

Fenwick didn't trouble to answer.

Having seen the dead man's face, he knew the killer had not been an ordinary rifle thief.

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The president replaced his glasses, and rapped his pencil on the table to call their attention.

" Well, gentlemen," he said. " That's the problem that this court has been convened to solve. Have either of you two any suggestions? "

There was a brief silence, then the subaltern called Black spoke: " Isn't it a fact, sir, that rifle thieves in India have been known to use hypnotism? Mightn't that account for the expression on the sentry's face that Captain Fenwick described, and the fact he offered no resistance? "

Major Grant smiled. " I'd been thinking of that myself. It's certainly a more likely solution than Captain Fenwick's devil. Well, has anybody any other suggestion? "

No one had anything to say. Major Grant closed a file with a sudden, decisive gesture. " We haven't enough evidence to give a finding," he said. " As president, I rule that this court be adjourned pending further investigations."

A week later, Fenwick returned to Maskira. He travelled by plane to Riyah on the mainland, and then by dhow to what the Arabs called the " Island of Devils."

Curiously, he was quite pleased to see the Island of Devils. It was cooler and fresher than Aden. He was popular with his Hassanis and the entire platoon had mustered on the beach to welcome him back.

They marched ahead of him to the fort. By custom there had to be a tea-party to celebrate his return. He drank tea and ate highly coloured iced cakes in the guardroom and felt he had come home to friends.

Only when the party was over did the hawk-faced Bimbashi, Ali Hug Hassani, ask what was uppermost in every man's mind.

" What did the court say, Sahib? Have those men in Aden decided of their wisdom who killed our brother? "

Fenwick told him what had happened at the court.

The Bimbashi gave a short laugh. " I know Major Grant Sahib of old," he said. " In the Protectorate Police they call him the man with a thousand ears. By Allah, he will need all the thousand if he is to detect what killed Hassan Khan! "

Fenwick agreed. During the weeks that followed he came to agree even more heartily. He'd had plenty of time on the island to devote himself to trying to solve the problem, but all his efforts were fruitless.

One night, he even stood sentry himself at the same hour and at the same spot as Hassan Khan Hassani had done. As on that night, there was a full moon and all was peaceful. His taut

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nerves made him imagine lurking forms in every shadow. When some bird of the night gave a call like a harsh laugh, he started, and clutched his rifle.

Nothing happened. He returned to the guardroom where the Bimbashi greeted him with a smile. "It is when you are unaware that the *jinn* will pounce, Sahib," he said. "Not when you are expecting him."

And then, one evening, without warning, a motor launch of the Protectorate Police appeared, heading for the island. Visitors were delightful rarities at Maskira. Fenwick, the Bimbashi, and every Hassani who was off duty were on the beach to greet Major Grant when he was carried pick-a-back through the surf by a stalwart Fadli policeman.

The little Chief of the Protectorate Police seemed in a good humour. He and Bimbashi Ali Hug Hassani greeted each other as old comrades. "What, Bimbashi? Are you still robbing the Aden Government? It's surely time you took the pension that you never earned."

The Bimbashi's grim face split in a smile. "Ah, Sahib, if I were to retire, who would see that these Fadli policemen, lazy dogs that they are, did their duty?" he retorted.

Tea was quickly prepared in the guardroom. Fenwick meanwhile marvelled to hear the Major chaff the Hassanis in their own idiom. He'd just been on a trip in the Hassani territory, and he delighted the men by telling them news of their villages—how their friends were faring, whose camels had died, and how the maize crop promised.

It became dark in the guardroom. Major Grant rapped on the table to command silence.

"We must now speak of the matter concerning which I have come to this island. Hassan Khan Hassani, a soldier in the service of the Government, died here in the performance of his duty, and it has become my duty to investigate his death."

It was as if a chill shadow had fallen. Grant turned to the Bimbashi. "Bimbashi Sahib, you are an educated man and a man of long experience. Do *you* believe it was a devil that killed Hassan Khan?"

The Bimbashi spoke slowly. "Allah alone knows the truth. For my part, I do not think his death was the work of an Oman rifle thief."

"Is that the opinion of every man?" There was a deep chorus of assent.

The Chief of the Protectorate Police had taken off his glasses and was polishing them. "All right," he said at last. "The

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whole of the Hassani platoon are of opinion that their brother was killed by a devil! Where has he been buried?"

"Behind the fort, Sahib. We placed wire around to keep away the hyenas."

"He is buried after the Hassani custom, standing in his grave, his arms folded, and his face towards Mecca?" Grant rapped out the question.

There was a sudden deathly silence. To Fenwick it seemed as if all the brooding fear that hung over the fort had rushed into the guardroom.

No one spoke, no one moved. Then the Bimbashi spoke in a strange voice: "Sahib, why do you ask that?"

The little Major smiled. "Bimbashi, they call me the man with a thousand ears. One of my thousand ears caught a whisper that last March there was a horrible murder in the Hassani Territory. An old woman, much respected and loved, who lived in the village of Salal was found strangled. But *that* murder was not the work of a devil. In her dead hand was found a button that had come from the tunic of an askari of the South Arabian Levies. Is it true, Bimbashi Sahib, that Hassan Khan was on leave in his village which is near Salal at that time?"

For an instant the Bimbashi did not answer. Then he struck the table with his clenched fist and sprang to his feet. Lean and fierce as a desert hawk, he confronted the Chief of the Protectorate Police.

"You have learnt the truth, Sahib with a thousand ears! Suspicion fell on Hassan Khan and the whisper came to this island. While he played football, we searched his kit and we found the tunic with the missing button and the gold bangles he had stolen. He never went on guard that night. While Fenwick Sahib slept, we held a trial in this guardroom. He confessed the truth and we executed him on this very table, after the Hassani custom.

"When he was dead we placed his body outside so that it might appear he had been killed while on duty. The matter was a shame to all the Hassani tribe and we wished to keep it secret."

"And you buried him upside-down with his face turned from Mecca?"

"Truly, Sahib. That is how we bury murderers."

Again, silence fell. Fenwick was stunned. "They're all murderers," he was thinking. "They strangled him on this very table . . . and I thought I knew my men!"

Surely there had been horror in Maskira Fort that night! He felt cold and sick, remembering Hassan Khan's face.

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Major Grant rapped the table. All eyes turned to him as he stood up, a little man who loved Arabs.

"I believe I have heard the truth," he said. "Hassan Khan was justly tried and executed by men of his own tribe for murdering an Hassani woman. Since this matter concerns the Hassanis alone, I will make no further investigation. I will write in my report that it was devil's work and leave the rest to Allah."

★ ★ ★

IN TUNE

Music hath charms—of many kinds, as can be seen from the following vocal and orchestral concert. See if you can call the tune, or recall the performer in the nine items on this programme. Count one point for the literary source, one for the author, and one for naming the performer, the instrument, or the musical item—as the case may be; making a total of twenty-seven points. The answers are on page 44.

1. *First a song with a lugubrious title—enough to make your blood run cold. It was too much for her audience. Nobody could stand it when first sung by this well-known theatrical matron, whose surviving children were all upon the stage.*
2. *A trio to choose from, two knights and a fool, all keeping time in their catches, and all very sweet and contagious, i' faith.*
3. *When, to the accompaniment of strings, she sang of high places, everyone would cry, "Beware! Beware!"*
4. *Now a symphony that makes one think of goblins. One of the party indeed was so carried away that she inadvertently took a young man's umbrella.*
5. *To be frank, the village seemed more interested in the new pianoforte than the tunes, until the shameless Jane played* his *favourite Irish song.*
6. *High and clear, through the studious cloisters, the organ and quire dissolve us into ecstasies.*
7. *Will no one tell me what she sings, single in the field? Well, you know who enjoyed this early example of music while you work.*
8. *What was he singing—this little fellow who was suspected of indigestion and a low mentality?*
9. *To end, a solo at the clavichord—those lesser thirds and diminished sixths make me feel chilly and grown old.*

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POPPIES AND PITMEN

"Pay-day and a' the wenches waiting," he said mockingly

by PERCY COATES

AT last the shift was over. The three men of Heading B timbered up their working place, and crawled from under a low grey roof out to the gate. Through long dark hours they had grappled with that powerful squat machine, punching at the brittle, brilliant wall of coal; and now they were free to lock away their tools—leave everything to the singing shadows.

Steve, their leader, reached for his shirt. His work-swollen fingers fumbled with the buttons at his throat. He said softly: "It's been the longest week—thank the Lord for Friday."

Reuben peered across the gallery at his mate. He was a big, burly man. Particles of carbon, caught in the mesh of hair at his chest, sparkled when he moved. "Pay-day," he said fervently. "Now we can get us some ale."

Phil was crouched in the side, near to Steve, thrusting his arms through the sleeves of his singlet. He laughed at Reuben's remark. The wind rippled across the roof, playing softly round his face to dry up the black streaming runnels of sweat. He said mockingly: "Pay-day—an' a' the wenches waiting."

"Thou doesna think o' much else," Steve said drily.

"If there's owt better—nobody ever told me."

"Thou'lt get caught," Reuben said dourly. "They'll niver let a fine fish like thee slip through their fingers. An' when they've gotten hold—how they'll squeeze and squeeze."

Phil laughed. His eyes flashed from Steve to Reuben, the whites shining like porcelain. He was free. Suddenly he began to sing. It was the latest catchy tune from the dance hall down in Chesterfield; and the deep sound of his voice went ringing along the steep tunnel which, presently, they must climb. It was good to be young, to be free, to be able to sing; even after a hard day's toil to dance some sweet-scented girl around a wax-polished floor.

"Let's get goin'—" he said strongly.

They walked single file, setting their feet hard against the sleepers; the roof coming low; each treading in the silver bubbles of light blown by the other's finger-hanging lamp. They

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climbed without words, until they reached the main level where there was space and height. Here they went crouching in the side for ease.

This was a junction. Massive girders, set in an elaborate pattern, held back a straining mass of rock. It was brilliantly lit. Through a close arc of opalescent light they started out to this thing which their hands had wrought. It was part of them, of their lives, their own conception; to be looked at, moved by; and this pride was beneficial because it robbed the sweat of its sting, the dark spilt blood of all its bitterness.

Phil and his butties again took up their long march down the runway where they encountered many obstacles—trains of trams, trap and curve of crossings, loose discarded clips—so that Phil must often shout the familiar significant warning, "Howd up your feet!"

But his mind was far ahead. The old town of Chesterfield must still be there, standing banded and brown in the deep wide valley; the spire soaring high to cast a crooked shadow over Salter Gate, Knifesmith Gate, where scanted laughter tinkled along the coloured pavements.

Behind him his mates were breathing heavily. He knew little of Reuben's surface life. Only that his shrewish wife led him a dickens of a dance in that small, mean colliery cottage, and in return he cut down her allowance to the bare bone, and sought solace in the pub. It was one way of life.

But Steve was different. He was an artist—and who can plumb the depths of an artist's mind? It was Steve who had chosen him for a mate, taught him his craft; who had talked to him quietly, often pointing out this strange, dark-flowering beauty of the underground.

"Look," he would say. And it might be iridescence floating on a dark-dusted pool; or the blaze of a flame-lamp shimmering golden like a small sun; or the polished black sculpture of Reuben's sweat-gleaming body with the light upon it; but moments and slight scenes fixed for ever by Steve in pictures which people sought for eagerly.

But here was the shaft side. They stood together under the dynamo flood of light and waited for the cage. Now they could smell the surface. It was so near. But the swift flight was wicked, snatching at their bowels; up and up, the guide-ropes screaming; until they were through, the bubble darkness burst at last; until suddenly they were out and thin November sunshine was falling like rain on the blackened roofs of these drab buildings.

The pit yard was almost festive with groups of men reckoning

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up their wages. Reuben stared swiftly round. The rustle of notes and jingle of coins was like music in his ears. Steve joined the queue at the pay-office; and the two butties went crouching against the engine-house opposite, feeling the powerful thrust of pistons through the flimsy brick wall.

"Buy a poppy, please." It was a cool low voice.

Phil turned quickly, remembering this was Poppy Day, and the girls would be there, themselves ruddy like the flowers they carried. He looked them over. A blonde and a brunette—but he liked blonde better. She was standing at the office door, slim and straight, and her eyes would be colour of blue cornflowers.

"Buy a poppy, please—"

When he came up behind her she turned at once, holding his stare for seconds; until her mouth drooped, and she broke away with a slight gesture of complete indifference.

"When I've drawn, I s'all come an' buy up all your stock."

But she would not heed him.

Steve was here, holding money in his cap; and all three together, in that strange collier crouch, were checking up the items on a long pay sheet. "It's on'y just reight," Reuben grumbled.

And the share-out was simple. One for you, one for me, until all the notes were gone, and then the silver. Phil's attention still fixed on the girl and the dress she was wearing, which was made of some purple material that swirled around her in the low breeze.

He said softly: "Hey, Stevie—what colour would you ca' yon?"

Steve followed his glance. "Mauve," he said.

A soft, cool sound.

But Reuben said acidly: "Do we reckon? Or do we stick here a' day?" Receiving a further affront when Steve bought poppies with the coppers left unshared. A waste of good money. All this flummery, and what earthly good was it?

But the scene was breaking up. Phil still held his crouch against the engine-house wall; words he would utter fluttering like moths in his brain. Steve walked away to the cycle-shed to start the long ride home through these quiet Derbyshire lanes. Reuben walking out to the bridge where he would make the final agonizing allocation: "One for me, one for her."

They would not meet again until dawn of Monday. Now the pit yard was almost deserted. The men had gone, and the great wheels on their tall towers were motionless. They seemed to brood heavily over the fields and the villages down to Chesterfield.

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The poppy girls were conscious of Phil's presence. When they were leaving, he came out of the shadow and began a bantering, calculated conversation with the dark girl. But she was shrewd. She stared at him mockingly, and said: "I'm off—three makes no sort o' company."

But he held back the blonde girl. "All these, how much?"

"Quite a bit," she said.

"What is it?" he was still insistent.

"Five shillings, then."

He reached out and gathered the flowers into one big dark hand. The coins fell tinkling into the box. "Music," he said, laughing. "Now I s'ould like to know your name."

"Lizzie," she said without hesitation.

"Fit for a queen," he countered swiftly.

They walked side by side through the dusty, debris-strewn pit yard over the bridge which spanned a railway, with the village spread out before them on the hillside, shimmering and flat in the refracted autumn light. The sun was swinging low and southward, cool, and coloured like an orange in the sky. They stood in shadow against the nearest street end; Phil asking questions which he imagined were very shrewd; the girl parrying these questions skilfully, a slight ironic smile curving her full red lips.

"Happen you work some place?" he was asking.

"Or I might be living at home, here in Normanton," she said.

"You might even be courtin'?"

"Who knows?" she said lightly.

Her cool unconcern was cutting deeply into his confidence. She knew what was happening to him, but her eyes remained cold and clear.

Almost diffidently he said: "I live down yon in Chesterfield."

"Yes—" she said.

"Maybe we could meet later on, an' go to th' pictures?"

"Tell me the old, old story," she chanted in mockery.

"But what else?"

"Good day," she said decisively.

She meant it. He must move quickly to intercept her. Now they were opposed, facing each other in the thin November sunshine, the fluid metal of her will setting hard against this trifling importunity. He had entered into this thing thoughtlessly, she knew. And she liked him. That was why she was here; why he must be made to understand.

"I'm not cheap like that," she said.

"I didna think it," he cried.

"Please let me pass."

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"No," he said. "We might never meet again."

"Is that anything?"

"It is to me," he said strongly. "I canna let you go now."

She looked at him steadily. He was tall and strong, and his finely shaped head was ringed around with curls that sweat and dust had fixed. She had watched him with his mates, sharing with them fully, sure of their respect and his place in the world of men.

This was a dangerous situation. It could lead to something sweet, but unknown, perhaps perilous in its consequences.

Again she lifted her eyes to his face. Something seemed to fuse in her spirit. She felt a sudden anguished desire to see him clean, clear of the grime and the sweat, standing tall and fine in the glare of electricity—waiting for her. It had been there all the time, this feeling. She smiled faintly. "Maybe you should hurry and catch your bus," she said.

He sensed the change at once. "If you'll walk wi' me," he said quickly.

"You're like a child who wants candy, and then more candy," she said softly.

He laughed delightedly. "Ay," he said, "but it's sweet—sweet—"

They walked away together, the red ash path crunching beneath their feet. Shadows were lengthening, and the sky had taken on the green of water. But the village was wide open; women standing at the doors of cottages, or in groups on the metal pavement, chattering like birds; with men crouched back against the brick walls lifting up their dust-powdered heads to murmur greetings.

But these were her people. Among them she could walk without fear or constraint. The poppies were still flaring absurdly in his hand. They caught the attention of children who were playing games in bright spurts of joy, so that they stared at him, and across to her, and shouted gleefully: "We've caught you—our Sylvia."

He looked down at her accusingly. "Sylvia!" he said.

"That's my name," she said meekly.

Now they were laughing together. Brilliantly, joyously, because they were young, because the whole world was open before them—because, maybe, they were falling deeply in love.

★ ★ ★

Pay as you go, but not if you intend going for good.

J. J. ROCHE

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SHE

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness

O Woman!—

Winning ways, airs innocent, maiden manners, sweet looks, loose locks, long locks, lovelocks, gaygear, going gallant, girlgrace.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

—In our Hours of Ease,

RAINA (*wonderingly*) Do you know, you are the first man I ever met who did not take me seriously?

BLUNTSCHLI You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously?

RAINA Yes: I suppose I do mean that. (*Cosily, quite at her ease with him*) How strange it is to be talked to in such a way! You know, I've always gone on like that.

BLUNTSCHLI You mean the—?

RAINA I mean the noble attitude and the thrilling voice. (*They laugh together*) I did it when I was a tiny child to my nurse. She believed in it. I do it before my parents. They believe in it . . . I suppose, now you've found me out, you despise me.

BLUNTSCHLI (*warmly, rising*) No, my dear young lady, no, no, no a thousand times. It's part of your youth: part of your charm. I'm like all the rest of them . . . I'm your infatuated admirer.

BERNARD SHAW, *Arms and the Man*

Uncertain, Coy, and Hard to Please,

Phillis is my only joy,
Faithless as the winds or seas;
Sometimes coming, sometimes coy,
Yet she never fails to please:
If with a frown
I am cast down,
Phillis smiling,
And beguiling,
Makes me happier than before.

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Tho' alas! too late I find
Nothing can her fancy fix,
Yet the moment she is kind
I forgive her all her tricks:
Which tho' I see,
I can't get free:
She deceiving,
I believing:
What need lovers wish for more?

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

And Variable as the Shade

Clare Arundel looked divine, dressed in a wondrous white robe garlanded with violets . . . Lothair danced with her and never admired her more. Her manner towards him was changed. It was attractive, even alluring. She smiled on him. She seemed interested in all he was doing, she flattered him by a mode which is said to be irresistible to a man, by talking of himself. When the dance had finished he offered to attend her to the tea-room. She accepted the invitation even with cordiality . . .

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, *Lothair*, 1870

By the Light Quivering Aspen made;

A woman's face is full of wiles,
Her tears are like the crocadill:
With outward cheer on thee she smiles,
When in her heart she thinks thee ill.
Her tongue still chats of this and that,
Than aspen leaf it wags more fast;
And as she talks she knows not what,
There issues many a truthless blast.

HUMFREY GIFFORD, 1580

When Pain and Anguish—

"I wish I could comfort you!" And as she spoke she also got up from her chair.

"And you can," said he, suddenly himself and coming close to her. "You can comfort me—in some degree. You and you only can do so. I know this is no time for declarations of love. Were it not that we are already so much to each other, I would not indulge myself at such a moment with such a wish. But I have no one whom I can love; and—it is very hard to bear." And then he stood, waiting for her answer.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *Orley Farm*

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—Wring the Brow,
Shepherd, be advised by me,
Cast off grief and willow tree:
For thy grief brings her content;
She is pleased if thou lament.

Author Unknown,
The Willow Tree

A Ministering Angel—

The celebrated Vanessa (Mrs. Montagu) has been either a beauty or a wit all her life long; and, of course, has a better plea for vanity than falls to most women's share; her vanity also is in itself more excusable for the pleasing colours it sometimes throws upon her character: it gives the spring to charity, good nature, affability; it makes her splendid, hospitable, facetious; carries her into all the circles of fine people, and crowds all the fine people into her's; it starts a thousand whimsical caprices that furnish employment to the arts, and it has the merit of opening her doors and her purse to the sons of science; in short it administers protection to all descriptions and degrees of genius, from the manufacturer of a toothpick to the author of an epic poem . . .

RICHARD CUMBERLAND,
in *The Observer*, 1785

—Thou!
Bid me to live, and I will live
Thy Protestant to be:
Or bid me love, and I will give
A loving heart to thee.
A heart as soft, a heart as kind,
A heart as sound and free
As in the whole world thou canst find,
That heart I'll give to thee.
Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
The very eyes of me,
And hast command of every part,
To live and die for thee.

ROBERT HERRICK, 1591–1674,
To Anthea,
who may command him anything

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RED HERRING

"It's no' you he's wantin' for to marry," she cried

by DAVID WALKER

THE Laird was cooling off a bit. "It's too much of a bluidy good thing, Donny, I mean a bad thing—poaching my pheasants in the nesting season."

"Just the one cock," said Donny Carmichael. "I wouldn't touch a hen. I wouldn't like the idea." Which was true.

He was on the mat. He glanced down across the table at the Laird, who had a red seamy face and white moustaches. The Laird had been a General before he retired—General Sir Angus McLusk, Basher McLusk, and some wee Basher, too, in North Africa. Here he was just the Laird, not too bad a daft old beezer.

"Pheasants is polygamous craters," Donny added. "The Laird kens that better'n I do."

"The Laird kens far less well. In polygamous matters the Laird is a child compared with Donny Carmichael. Too much fun and games and nocturnal cock pheasant, Donny, my boy. What you need—as I said last autumn when you declined to be under-keeper—what you need is a steady job, and something else to take the itch out of your feet at two in the morning."

In all the wide county of Crummoch there was no poacher like Donny Carmichael, the rabbit-trapper—nobody who could outwit the wary deer or provoke the resting salmon, nobody who could do this and that and other things boldly and speedily by day, darkly and softly in the night. Oh, that bad boy was a great snatcher of bird and beast and beauty, and nobody knew it better than Donny Carmichael! But now, at last, he had been caught red-handed by his arch-enemy, Lachlan Macduff. Donny's pride had suffered a sharp blow for one mere roosting cock pheasant.

"I'm sorry, Donny. You add spice to life in this glen, and we're going to miss you. But you've trapped out all my rabbits; and after this incident the under-keeper's job is irrevocably out, even if you wanted it, which you don't. You can stay on at the bothy till the end of the month."

The Laird was loyal to his henchman. He did not mention Macduff's ultimatum, which had clinched the matter: "Yon

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wor-rthless Carmichael goes, or I go. The Laird will take his choice."

"I'm sorry, young feller," he said again. "But somehow I don't imagine you'll starve to death." He stood up. He was a small tough man, and Donny was a big tough man. "I wish you'd marry some wholesome girl and become a respectable character—what a hope!"

"Well, sir," Donny said, "it's this way. It's the long nights. I never met a lassie yet I could be having conversation with night after night in murky winter till the cows come hame." He shook his head gravely. "And bairns settin' up a hellish squawk." He shuddered.

"Talkin' of females," said the Laird—he was a terrible old gas-bag—"I hear Macduff's daughter, Mary, is back. Was she here in your time?"

"We're not acquainted," Donny said shortly, and added, "one Macduff's as good as a muckle feast."

"H'mm," mused the Laird. "Now there's a decent respectable wench. Plain though, alas, and a trifle dumpy. No conversation, either. Well, good night, you rascal."

"Good night, sir." Donny turned to go.

"Oh, by the way, Donny, I heard on the grape-vine that somebody had invented a new kind of salmon lure—not a fly, not a spoon, not a bundle of worms. I heard somebody had killed salmon in the Brig Pool with this strange fish-nor-flesh-nor-good-red-herring sort of thing. Any such rumour come your way?"

Donny turned at the door, puzzled. "No," he said. "I never heard tell of the like of yon. Would somebody mebbe be after dangling a red herring before the Laird's own eyes?"

"More than likely," said the Laird.

Donny went out, and put on his famous old maroon beret from the war, and kicked up his motor-bike, and he and bike and capacious side-car went pop-pop pobble-pobble, very respectable, down the drive and along the road by the river. The cool air of evening touched Donny's ruddy cheeks. The Laird's a foxy old so-and-so, he thought. And he thought also: Red Herring—not a bad name for it! He was going to miss the Laird, a man able to talk around the point and hint at meanings almost as well as Donny himself.

But he was not going to miss Macduff, the head keeper. Donny Carmichael considered ways and means of getting his own back on Mr. Lachlan Macduff.

Next morning he was up early. A thin white quilt of mist lay

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upon the river. Spiders' webs made rainbows up the hill. Donny went to the well behind his bothy or cottage, and drew a pail of water, and doused himself from curly top to big bare toe. After that, he flexed his mighty muscles and capered around a bit in the buff with only birds to watch him. Then he supped half a gallon of porridge and cream, drank plenty of strong tea, and was ready for the road.

It's time I was away out o' this glen, he thought, riding at a good pace beside the river. Och, it's a dull-like place, and the lassies is nothing special. There's other glens fornent the hill.

It was towards another glen beyond the hill that he was making, this fine morning. The Laird's property ran on both sides of the river right up to the pass, and when the Laird said, " Out of my bothy, Donny Carmichael," he meant, " out of my glen altogether." Beyond the pass, Glentocher dropped down west. There were still plenty of rabbits, so they said, in Glentocher; and rabbits provided the respectable front or background for Donny's more enterprising operations. Glentocher was worth a reconnaissance.

Thus, Donny Carmichael was not low in spirit. On the contrary, he was as cheerful as only a foot-loose bachelor may be. He was still singing as he drew up at Malloch's, the sweetie shop and rural post office, shortly before eight o'clock. ". . . *Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay, My bride and my darling to be?* "

The upstairs window opened. Not Leezie Lindsay but Ailsa Malloch popped her head out. " Oh, it's you, Donny," which she knew quite well, and she came down to open the door in less than no time. Ailsa Malloch was not the only lady who hastened to open doors for Donny Carmichael, but she was the bonniest one. Ailsa was plump, with a lively eye. " And what would *you* be after wanting? " she inquired, dressed and combed and still sleepy, and he went in.

" A quarter of toffees, for one thing," Donny said, raising his eyes in mute question to the ceiling.

" Bob's awa'," she said, weighing toffees. " He left early for to move the ewes and lambs up Ben Bannock."

" That would be a two-day job, would it not, mebbe? "

" It would, mebbe." She gave a twist to the top of the white paper bag and handed it over. " Would there be onything else, Mr. Carmichael? "

" That's enough toffees," Donny said gravely. " I'm hoping it'll be a fine braw night for to move the ewes and lambs up Ben Bannock."

" I'm hoping that, too," said Mistress Malloch.

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Donny said *au revoir* to bonny Ailsa, and rode away west. Well, who should he come upon round a corner but Mr. Lachlan Macduff striding along, a Labrador at his heels, jazzy knickerbocker suit, hat with salmon flies in it, the stuck-up old so-and-so. When he saw Donny, he pushed his long nebby nose higher.

Donny drew up, saluted respectfully, called: "Top o' the mornin' to you, auld Boozy!" and rode on before that lifelong teetotaller could even splutter. Not one of his best, but not bad either.

Donny felt fine. He felt that the larches in feathery pale leaf, and the warm sun, and the far blue cliffs of Bannock, and the lambs butt-butting for their breakfast, and the likes of bonny Ailsa Malloch—he felt that all these had been fashioned for the especial delight of Donny Carmichael this May morning in the thirtieth carefree year of his age.

Things happened. They happened just about as suddenly as an .88 shell would arrive across the Italian valley to say howdy and good-bye, or as suddenly as a shaft of lightning would zig-zag to the moor.

What happened was that a small black puppy burst out of the wood, and a person dived after it across the road. Donny stood on everything, skidded, swung to the left ditch. The wheel of the side-car tipped up, hovered, subsided. It was a near squeak by inches. "What the—" he began in a fine flow of relieved vexation.

"Riding like a daft loony at forty miles an hour!"

"Havers! I wasn't doing near . . ." But Donny stopped. He stared. He gulped. Shivers went down his spine. He goggled, and his bones turned to water.

"Goodness me," Donny mumbled, removing the famous parachutist beret.

Before him stood the bonniest lassie in the whole wide world. Her hair was rippling wheat in August. Her eyes were bluer than bluebells on the hill, her skin far softer than petals of the rose. Her shoulders were undulant perfection. Her bosom heaved and her waist curved in and her hips slipped over and her limbs sped down—oh gentle, oh supple, oh strong—to the bare brown slimness of two cherry saplings.

Donny had just reached a pair of ankles to which even the immortal Rabbie Burns could never have done justice, when she spoke again, vexed but quieter: "Scorchin' road hog! Who do you think you are?"

Scorchin' road hog, like cascading water where the green ferns play. "I think I'm . . ." he began, and stopped. "Donny

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Carmichael," he blurted out. He would have said sorry for going forty or ninety or any speed she cared to mention. But he was stricken dumb by beauty, and his throat was strangled by a dreadful dagger of a thought. The kilt she blessed was a kilt of the Macduff tartan. Donny groaned.

" Donny Carmichael! " she mused more kindly. " You've gone a wee thing pale. Did you hurt yourself, then? "

He shook his head. He looked at the puppy wriggle-wriggling to be free of her arms against the golden sweater. Donny's tongue chose that moment to burst its bonds.

" Daft wee pup," he muttered.

" What was it you said? "

" I said braw wee pup." Better.

" I'm Mary Macduff," she confirmed.

This angel was daughter to that gurny old bag of pious bones? And what was it the Laird said last night?

" Mr. Macduff the head keeper's daughter? "

" That's me," she said. Then she smiled at him.

It was the smile that blitzed this ex-blade into still worse disaster. " The Laird said you was plain though, alas, and a trifle dumpy," he gulped accusingly.

Her eyes flashed fire. She gave a stamp. " The Laird never did! " she cried. " And as for you, Mr. Donny Carmichael, you're the daftest-speaking, dumpiest-like man I ever set eyes on."

" I ken that fine," said Donny Carmichael humbly, he who had but to crook a lordly finger. And he stared at Mary Macduff and he stared at her and he stared at her until she said with a pout, " Would you be knowing me the next time? "

" I would," he sighed. " You're that bonny."

She blushed in a tide up out of the sweater, and her lips parted, and she said in quite a different tone of voice: " Are you visiting in the glen, Mr. Carmichael? "

" No," he said. Now—and time, too—he got off his bike, and the puppy yapped at him, and he did not dare even to look at the puppy.

" My goodness," she said in that soft Highland voice with a refined nice-speaking thing in it, too. " My goodness, you're a big laddie when you stand up."

This was the kind of remark strange ladies were apt to make to Donny. But it rang no bell now. Now all he said was, " I'm just a trapper." He, the greatest poacher and merriest card in all Crummoch. And he added: " I'm away at the end o' the month."

" I'm on holiday for May, too," she said. " I work down in

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Edinburgh." She turned, perhaps making a move to go, and turned back.

"What kind of work would it be?" asked Donny, playing for time. *Och, stay with me for ever while the blackbird sings yonder of his love.*

"At Watson's," she explained. "That's a big store. I'll need to go now because I never got my breakfast yet. It's the Highland air again makes me sleepy."

It makes her sleepy. "What department-like do you work in?"

"In Bras," she said; then went scarlet. Perhaps a fevered alchemy was playing tricks with Mary Macduff's tongue, too. "I mean . . ."

"You mean like candlesticks and ashtrays and fancy wee figures?" offered the bemused Carmichael.

Miss Macduff laughed merrily and loudly and it sped around with music to hush the blackbird. "I mean fancy wee figures," she said, giggling the bonniest chuckling giggle. "Cheeri-bye then, Mr. Carmichael." She really did turn away this time, and, puppy-laden, sprang like a gazelle across the ditch, and walked up the narrow path, swaying and rippling from one lithe hip and lower limb to the other.

"Be at the Brig at five?" he called in cracked desperation.

She glanced back with a toss of silken hair. "We'll see," she murmured.

Donny rode west. "We'll see," she said. "We'll see." Oh, speed the long seconds and the minutes and the hours until we see! Only this morning Donny had sung a carefree song for all the Highland world to hear. Now he sang another, but sadly and deeply, to himself alone: "*Oh, I love a lassie, a bonny, bonny lassie . . . She's as sweet as the heather, the bonny bloomin' heather, Mary, ma Scotch bluebell.*"

Then he stopped singing and tried to see her face, but he could not see it. She can laugh, too, he thought. Which was another miracle, just like an ordinary lassie. But he could not recapture that melodious laugh, nor any other individual things. All he could remember was a flashing dream. Nothing else had ever happened, not even old Boozy, her teetotal father.

But here was the Brig Pool where at five o'clock we'll see. At this place road crossed river. At this place the Lusk flowed through a rocky cleft. At this place salmon lurked, torpedo shadows in deep water. At this still place nobody but Donny Carmichael had ever taken a fish by legitimate means.

He left the bike, and sat with legs dangling over the bridge. Now he saw salmon, yet did not see them. Now, being a non-smoker for the sense of smell, he drew a sweet from his pocket,

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and took off the wrapping, and threw the caramel into the river, and put the paper in his mouth, and chewed it up.

Donny rode on to inspect Glentocher, and forthwith changed his mind. He could not bear to leave Glenlusk. He stopped at the Forestry Commission's new plantation a mile up the glen, and asked for casual labour and was set to digging hill drains. On this, his first day of common work since being demobbed five years ago, he dug so passionately, far surpassing all previous records by wee men digging, that the head chap said with respect: "Man, you're the brawest digger I ever saw! There's steady work here if you want it, Donny."

"The morn's morn," said Donny, meaning tomorrow. "Steady work!" he said to himself, picking wild primroses at ten to five. "That's the thing to make a man respectable."

No Mary at the Brig. Not a sign of life but a whaup wheeling and crying above the bog. He stared down the wooded glen. She would never come.

She came on a bicycle. The good west wind and the evening sun made dances with her hair. She had not been a dream. She was real and alive and she pedalled strongly, and she was some dream in sweater, kilt, and sturdy shoes. He could not guess what bonny thoughts were running through her bonny head.

Donny was speechless again. He thrust the primroses at her much as a gruff policeman makes presentation of a parking ticket, not as a lover in the first joys of giving.

Mary disdained them, pursed her generous lips, and sighed. Then she looked up, said broad: "Ye never telt me."

"N—never telt ye wh—what?" he stammered.

"Never telt me ye was just a common poacher."

What terrible words for the most uncommon poacher in Crummoch and Scotland to hear! But if she said it, then that was what he was, a common poacher, a fly-by-night, the enemy of good honest folk.

"Pheasants in the nestin' season!" she said contemptuously, this keeper's lovely daughter.

"Just the one cock," he pleaded. "Just the one cock for to eat it roastit to my supper."

"And the stags and the hinds and the roe-deer and the salmon and the wild geese and the grouse and the pertricks on the stubble . . ." she recited her remorseless list of shame.

Donny looked down at the pool where salmon lurked. He could not see them. "I'm in steady work the now."

"Steady work! My Dad says you never did an honest job in all your born days. My Dad says I'm not to see you. I wouldn't be seen dead wi' a poacher, even if my Dad never said it."

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Donny Carmichael bowed his head. Then he threw her primroses over the Brig. They scattered, fell, and were borne down the cold waters of the Lusk. Found and picked and cast away. Good-bye, wildflowers.

"Good-bye," she said. It might have been a sob or not.

He watched his only, new-lost, cruel love go riding down the glen.

Five days Donny dug ditches. Five mornings on the road up, and five evenings on the road down, he prayed for a meeting with Mary Macduff. The fifth night she did just happen to be walking that puppy on the leash. Donny stopped. "Och, Mary!" he squeaked, him.

But her shapely nose uptilted, and she pulled the pup away.

This wasn't the Donny Carmichael who had taken a machine-gun post alone at Arnhem to win his D.C.M. This wasn't the Donny Carmichael who could shoot a red deer and carry it five miles from the hill on his broad back, and skin it and quarter it and stow it in the side-car, and be getting his money for prime venison before Lachlan Macduff had reached the death-scene. This wasn't the Donny Carmichael who made strong ladies weak. This was a sad lump of a creature, off his feed.

Well, of course, after five days he gave up steady work, and then he just hung about the bothy, or lurked among the heather, hoping for a sight of Mary far away down at her Dad's cottage. He couldn't work, he couldn't play, he couldn't even be bothered to guddle a trout for supper.

The days dragged by to May the thirtieth. This last night he was in such a woeful state that he went into Lusktoon to seek oblivion at the Black Watch Arms. Dram after fiery dram went down his throat. He spoke no word to his fellow men. Just before closing time, he marched from the pub, mounted his bike, and rode like a demon up the glen. Donny had a tremendous, if rarely tested capacity; but a bottle of Scotch whisky is a bottle.

He left his bike on the road and stalked round Macduff's cottage in the gloaming to an open window which, he knew too well, belonged to Mary. The house was silent but for distant snores from Dad.

Outside that window Donny crooned his serenade. For one hour he sang, and during that hour no answer came, and during that hour the whisky did its dirty work, until Donny Carmichael was not singing to Mary Macduff, the only girl who had ever struck him speechless: he was singing to all his other girls rolled into this bonny one.

He sang that Italian song he had sung to slumbrous Camilla.

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He sang a *chanson d'amour* to gay Céleste. He sang *Du bist mein Herz* to comely Gretchen in Coblenz. He sang *Leezie Lindsay* to bonny Ailsa Malloch. He whispered a song to many others, each by name, until Highland evening passed into Highland night, and he was sung out.

The moon lent extra burnish to Miss Macduff's hair as she leaned out of the window at last and hissed: "Drunk, poachin' beast, I hate you!"

No wonder either, for no lady likes to be sung to under twenty other ladies' names with very personal improvising. How could Mary know, even had she so wished, that the small song to each of these made one great symphony to her?

Donny slunk off, lurched home, slept on the bare floor, and woke with a battle-axe of a headache.

He doused himself at the well, drank tea but faced no porridge, packed rifles, gun, rods, snares, binoculars, Sunday suit, etcetera, into the side-car, and rode west to shake for ever the dust of Glenlusk from his rubber-soled parachutist boots.

He did not want to speak to anyone, least of all a woman, but his thirst was so terrible that he stopped at Malloch's to buy three bottles of pop.

"Ta-ta then, Mousie!" said Ailsa Malloch.

Mousie Carmichael ignored this. He rode again past big hoose and fateful cottage, past trees and birds and flowers and beasts on this last May morning. He did not know whither he now went, except that it was west. He hated mankind, including himself and Miss Macduff. I'll teach them, he thought, although he did not know exactly whom he wanted to teach what.

But it was this teaching mood, quite different from the timorous gloom of recent days, that made him decide to teach the Laird and all humanity by taking one last salmon out of the Brig Pool.

There had been rain yesterday. The river was up five inches. Accordingly, he hid his vehicle in a secret place, removed a rod and a greased line, took off his famous beret, and withdrew Red Herring from the pocket he had sewn for it in the lining. He tied that to eight feet of nylon, and nylon to line, and stalked back through bushes to the bridge.

Donny was in a mood when he would have preferred to fish in public, and to hell! But the outwitting of man and the bettering of fish were joint parts of achievement for a sporting poacher of his calibre. Furthermore, the first and only idiotic slip of his career—over one mere pheasant—rankled again deeply.

Now Donny Carmichael, who had a painful headache, was

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suddenly and wholly himself as he slipped, not onto the bridge, but underneath and in against one end of the old stone arch, up to his thighs in icy water. There was no room to cast Red Herring as a fly. So he had evolved a special technique for down here below the hollow-sounding bridge.

To a non-fisherman the thing would have looked easy. An expert would not have thought so. But nobody was there to watch him. He freed the ratchet on his reel, and spun her out to the exact spot and distance. He mended line, which is to say he made a deft semi-circular flick—up, over, and down—with the point of the rod, and a loop snaked along the line, and cocked Red Herring at precisely the right angle into the stream. He gave more line, watching it float down in a long curve, only nylon and lure below surface. As the line swung across he began to reel in, dipping and raising for provocation. Nothing happened.

He cast again and again and again, deliberately, carefully, slipping a foot more line each time, till he had covered the water. No result.

He added one small lead shot to sink Red Herring a fraction deeper. He waited till a car had rumbled over head. He was wholly absorbed. He began again.

At the very first cast, the line checked in its swing, and dipped. There was the faintest tug, then slack, then a strong pull. Donny struck. He had provoked his salmon.

It was a big fish, at least a twenty-pounder, he knew before it jumped. Then he knew it was much more than that, and his tackle was light, and he knew also from the way this big fish played that it was not well and truly hooked. He knew many more things as line was ripped a dozen times from screaming reel, and he would recover ten feet to lose another twenty, and now all the line was out and half the backing, and the fish jumped yet again—point down—a silvery bow, splash out, splash in, at the far bottom of the pool. Then all went slack. He reeled in fast. Lost? Donny knew better. The salmon came nearly to the bridge before it turned, and backing and most of line were on the drum once more.

But Donny was not relieved. He had to play this salmon light, give, give, and coax back, firmly, delicately, until it was tired out. He also knew what the fish would do next. It had made the long run once, and yielded. The second time it made that run . . .

As the line cut a streaking, spraying V downstream, he clambered somehow or other from below the bridge and up the precipitous face, and now he was twenty feet above the river, jumping from rock to rock along the brink, keeping line clear of snags,

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slipped once, saved himself. He followed that salmon clean out of the Brig Pool and down a loud white riffle and into the next deep place before it checked.

An hour later—or it might have been two—the salmon was nearly ready for the gaff. It rolled out there beyond deep water, showing a lemony-silver glint of belly. In a minute now, he would bring it across. But first get down to the water's edge. Donny panted. He ached in many places. He began . . .

It was then that the fish made a last expiring dash to the far bank, and turned down. Donny was off balance. He whipped the rod point over too late. The line snagged round that boulder, under a ledge. Impasse—Donny at the deep side of the river, salmon near the shallow bank—taut line from him to cursed rock, and angled down to salmon.

He had just decided that the best slim hope was to swim across, when who should come walking with downcast head but Mary Macduff, along a shady path beyond the Lusk?

Donny Carmichael did not hesitate one instant. "Mary!" he bellowed. "Come doon!"

She started, put slim hand to throat, and came to the water's edge. She took in the situation with one swift keeper's daughter's glance. "Poachin' again!" she cried accusingly, yet with a quaver.

"Hud yer whisht!" commanded Donny—a rude Scots "shut-up." "See if you can move yon fish."

Highland Mary stared at him, and her lips made a rebellious pout. But she thought better of defiance, removed her shoes and socks, and waded in to move that fish. She approached it from below, and from the sides. That fish would not move up and past the rock. She looked at Donny. She shrugged her sweatered shoulders. It was too far to throw the gaff.

"You'll need to catch it in your arms," he called.

She balked at that. "I'm no' wantin' to get wet all over."

"Soft city lassie that you are," he sneered harshly. At this tense time Donny Carmichael did not see the lady of his timorous dreams. He saw a reluctant female to be bludgeoned. "Get away in, then."

She got away in without a word. Mary Macduff showed that she was a true daughter of this rugged glen. She stalked the tired salmon from downstream. She crouched like a tigress before the spring. She plunged in knee-deep river. There was a mighty belly-flopping splash and watery commotion, but when Mary emerged she held the arching salmon in her strong brown arms.

It was some salmon. It stretched from the hollow of her neck

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right down a valleyed prison to her knees. A salmon is not an easy thing to clasp, but wet Mary clasped it.

"Guid work!" said Donny, giver of praise where praise was due.

But what was this? Down the far bank two figures raced. They arrived with loud fury. "Young rascal!" screamed the Laird, Basher McLusk, that irascible small General and man. "Caught red-handed in the verra act!" boomed Lachlan Macduff. "And you, Mary!" Horror and outrage.

Poor Mary. She had braved cold waters for this fish. But her father's righteous wrath undid her. The great fish slithered. The barbed Red Herring—kept in that salmon's mouth by Donny's matchless, light-handed touch through hours and many runs and jumps—came free. The fish lay quivering on its side in shallow water. "Get it!" yelled the Laird.

But the heart was gone from Mary. She did try to plunge again, too late. The salmon came to an even keel, gave one tired wriggle of wide tail, and slid off to fight another day, or better still—to father myriads of baby salmon.

Donny Carmichael reeled in, drew breath, exploded: "Thirty-five pound! Thirty-five pound, and it stretching from Mary's neck right away doon to Mary's knees. A guid yard long, or I'm a Dutchman!" But Donny was no phlegmatic burgher. He was about the biggest Highlander in all the Highlands, in the biggest rage. He ranted.

"Steady, old boy!" said the Laird during a pause in the tirade. The Laird's shrewd foxy look had come over the Laird's daft face. "Hard luck, I must say. As a matter of interest, Donny, what did you hook that fish on?"

"The Red Herring, the Laird's own name for it." Donny glowered over the river at stocky Laird, at lanky bag-of-bones Macduff, at shivering Mary. The rage fell off him. Suddenly again now, he saw Mary, his only late-found love, his lady lost, his dream. Bedraggled, perhaps, but no less bonny wet; in fact, more so.

"I say, young feller, might I just have a look at that Red Herring?"

Donny shook his head. Certainly not, by no means, not on your life. But Donny's not inconsiderable wits, now miraculously restored, were working fast.

"Oh please, Donny. It's not much to ask, I mean, after all, between fishermen and old soldiers. Do be a sport, dear boy." The Laird's eyes gleamed. He was a fanatical plier of the salmon waters.

"I just might," said Donny. "Under two condeetions."

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" Ask, boy, ask! What are they? " They used to say in the Desert that Basher McLusk was one man Rommel feared. Basher McLusk was not leading his tanks now, but he was the same old cunning, ruthless Basher. He would ride tank-shod over any obstacle for that Red Herring, that magical, impossible-achieving lure.

" Firstly," said Donny with courteous bow. " I would have to be having the under-keeper's job."

" You shall have it. Of course you'll have it. Shan't he, eh, Macduff? "

Macduff spluttered speechless.

" Second," said Donny without embarrassment. " I would be needing permission to ask for Miss Mary's hand in marriage."

" Over my deid body," said Lachlan Macduff. " A common poacher married untae Mary! The verra idea! "

The Laird rounded on him. " Don't be a fool, Lachlan. A fine upstanding boy like that! He'll make the best under-keeper in Crummochshire, and well you know it. Besides, think of the grandsons he'd provide for you. They're all there is for us old fogies. Just think of those sturdy spanking little nippers, half a dozen probably, at least."

" Half a dozen hellions," growled Macduff.

It was Mary herself who settled her Dad's hash. " It's no' you he's wantin' for to marry," she cried broadly, hotly, city refinement vanished, flushing more wetly pink than she already had about the half a dozen hellions.

Thus Lachlan Macduff was bulldozed into acquiescence. Donny made a lazy, easy, deceptive sweep, and Red Herring flew over to land at the Laird's feet.

" Well, I'll be damned," muttered Basher. " A black and scarlet-painted quill, tail of green feathers, weighted too. What an outlandish object! I don't believe . . ."

" Yon's a piece of a porkypine quill," said Donny. " My sister Hilda out in New Brunswick, she pulled it from her spaniel's nose and sent it in a letter. I just had the inspiration, so I gave it a wee dab of Post-Office paint, and I tied the tail plumes of the drake mallard. It rides free on the gut, as the Laird can see for hisself . . ."

" The Laird is far too bamboozled to see anything. How do you fish it, Donny? "

" I'll come away over," Donny Carmichael said. He dived in, rod and gaff and all, and swam away over, and waded out, very large and wet, and told the Laird how to fish it.

The Laird was a braw fisher, too, not quite as good as Donny himself, one of the very best, though. " Lead on, Macduff! "

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he cried, but led the way up stream at a shuffling trot, followed by future Grandad with the gaff. The pair of old fogies disappeared.

They were alone together by the quiet Lusk. Warmth stole up, and the kindly sun shone down on Donny Carmichael and Mary Macduff, as wet as couple could ever be. But dampness and chill—do they prevail against the kindling fires of love?

It was some time later that wild yoicks and banshee yells and fearful yodels sounded from up river at the Brig.

"My goodness," murmured Highland Mary. "What's up?"

"It's only the Laird into a fish."

Basher McLusk was an ice-cold little devil in a battle, but he screamed blue murder when first he hooked a salmon. The sounds diminished.

"Mebbe he'll land it and mebbe not," said Poacher Carmichael, new under-keeper. "*I'm* no' carin'."

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ANSWERS to IN TUNE
on page 22

1. *Mrs. Crummles, who gave the original spirited rendering of "The Blood Drinker" in "Nicholas Nickleby," by Charles Dickens.*
2. *Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and the Clown, in "Twelfth Night," by William Shakespeare.*
3. *The Abyssinian maid, with her dulcimer, who sang of Mount Abora, in "Kubla Khan," by S. T. Coleridge.*
4. *The performance of Beethoven's Fifth, in "Howards End," by E. M. Forster.*
5. *Jane Fairfax, who played "Robin Adair" on her newly—and mysteriously—acquired pianoforte, in "Emma," by Jane Austen.*
6. *The "Service high and Anthems clear," in "Il Penseroso," by John Milton.*
7. *Yon solitary Highland lass, in "The Solitary Reaper," by William Wordsworth.*
8. *The little tom-tit who sang "Willow, titwillow, titwillow," in "The Mikado," by W. S. Gilbert.*
9. *Baldassaro Galuppi, playing one of his toccatas, in Robert Browning's poem, "A Toccata at Galuppi's."*

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BACK OF THE MOLUCCAS

"Danger? . . . There is always some danger," he answered

by JOHAN FABRICIUS

THE K.P.M. ship *Willem Ysbrandtsz Bontekoe* was heading for one of the green, hilly islands of which she had passed so many in the course of the last few days. As the vessel neared land, the handful of passengers lounging under the awning saw that same palm-shaded beach to which they had already grown so accustomed, washed by the languidly rolling waves of the Molucca Sea. The only special feature of this strip of shore was a primitive wooden pier, beside which a motor boat bobbed up and down at its moorings.

A short distance inland lay the residence of the local Controleur —a house in European-East-Indian style, its brownish-red, low roof supported on whitewashed columns, with the front verandah, flanked by palms in tubs, seeming in itself a hospitable invitation to walk in and take one's ease. From a flagstaff in the middle of the grassy field that was the forecourt hung the red, white, and blue Netherlands flag, motionless in the stillness of the tropical morning.

As the anchor of the steamboat splashed rattling down into the eddies of mud which the propeller had churned up, the motor boat cast off from the jetty and made for the *Bontekoe*, tracing an elegant, curved course through the water. The steersman was a native policeman. On the afterdeck, in his white uniform and pith helmet, stood the Controleur, holding a brief-case in one hand, and leading by the other his little son, a four-year-old toddler.

With his eyes half closed to shut out the glare of the sunlight off the water, the young official looked up at the passengers who were now hanging over the rail—privileged mortals who had dropped in on him for an hour or so from the world of white folk, which here seemed so unreal—Batavia, Surabaya, Semarang—to cast a glance at his lonely post of duty, and then to travel farther on their way.

Though the boat's arrival excited him a little, he did not show it. With a dignity befitting his rank and office, he ascended the vessel's ladder, without undue haste. But his little boy could not restrain his feelings so easily; quick as a monkey, the child shinned up the steps and scuttled across the deck, between the smiling passengers, to the bridge. He knew the way there from previous occasions; the Captain caught him up in his arms, and asked him whether he had brought his mother with him?

"Mummy isn't very well," the boy replied, twisting himself loose in order to get at the big wheel of the vessel.

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" Not very well? " echoed the Captain.

The Controleur, appearing on the bridge in his turn, explained matters: " My wife just couldn't come this time. She was terribly sorry, believe me. But we're expecting it any day now . . ."

" Oh, it's due already, is it, Vermeer? Yes, of course, I remember now what you said last time . . . how are things, are you all right for help? "

The young official nodded. " I've called in the midwife who works on these islands. I think you know her—she's an Amboinese."

" Marie! " exclaimed the Captain. " Who doesn't know Marie? As black as the ace of spades, but if you've got her handy your wife doesn't need to be afraid of anything! "

" She *isn't* afraid, either," said Controleur Vermeer; a note of pride trembled in his voice. " It was even more difficult last time." His eyes wandered to Harry, who was busy at the wheel steering an imaginary, breath-taking course between rocks and savage currents. " Then we were right out in the jungle, nearly a week by boat from Banjermasin! *That* little spot of mischief there arrived much earlier than we'd expected, and we had to call in the local witch-doctor! " He laughed shortly. " I said to my wife—that's not going to happen again! And I couldn't care less what she thought about it; I went to fetch Marie, two days ago, actually. After all, at this time of the year . . ."

The young man, nervously animated by this sudden contact with the outside world, could not stop talking once he had started. He realized it himself, and broke off short, as if caught redhanded in some embarrassing situation.

" Where's my mail? " he asked, adopting a businesslike tone.

" I've laid it out ready for you in my cabin. There you can sit and look through it in peace. And in the cool; I've just managed to get a fan installed. I'll tell them to bring you a tankard of nice cold beer."

The very words were music to his ears. " Cold beer! It's thirteen weeks to the day since I last tasted anything cold! "

Vermeer's face lit up as he thanked him. " How much time have I got? " he asked, from the doorway of the Captain's cabin.

The skipper glanced at the clock in the chart-room. " Two hours. I'm afraid you'll have to settle all your correspondence in that time. It's not long—but I shall have to be off before noon. I'm bound to tide and currents, you know."

" I'll see how far I get," said the Controleur, with a comical sigh. " There's quite a lot of the stuff again . . ."

He sat down at the table and began to sort out the official letters marked with a blue *S* for *Spoedantwoord verzocht . . . Immediate reply requested.*

Captain Hoekstra downed his own glass of cold gin at a gulp, and stared into space, shaking his head, while he tried to imagine the unimaginable. " Nothing but warm stuff. All the time. Thirteen weeks at a stretch . . ."

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"Who was that nice young man?" Mrs. Wurtzel asked the ship's doctor, Van Dommelen, who was lounging in a cane chair beside her, smoking a cigar.

Mrs. Wurtzel was a rich American, who was making a voyage through the East Indian Archipelago in the company of her young niece, Patricia Dixon, and while on board the *Bontekoe* had commandeered the ship's doctor—a calm, staid man of her own age, who had nothing to do all day anyway, and so was able to listen to her and answer the many interested questions she asked about anything and everything.

"What a shame!" she exclaimed indignantly, after he had informed her that the charming young fellow in question was the "District Officer" in charge of the group of islands, and had to work through his mail instead of coming and sitting with them. She looked round for her niece. But Patricia was engrossed in profound conversation with the Second Engineer, a slim, dark young man with whom she had been flirting ever since leaving Macassar.

The skipper came down from the bridge. He was carrying Harry on his arm, fathering him a little bit—it was easy to see that he missed his own children. "I say, Doctor," he said, "Controleur Vermeer's just told me his wife's nearing her time. Maybe you wouldn't mind going and taking a look at her?"

Van Dommelen rose to his feet, thankful for the good excuse he had just been given to leave Mrs. Wurtzel to her own devices. Before the Doctor went, he translated to her the news he had just heard.

"What! A baby? How thrilling!"

For one uncomfortable moment he feared that, out of sheer enthusiasm and warmth of sympathy, she would decide to accompany him to the shore. But Mrs. Wurtzel, amply built, and no longer as young as she had been—although amazingly vital in many respects—had already discovered that this land of the Indies was hot, and that she could see all there was to see quite easily, or perhaps even best, from her deck chair.

However she appeared, all interest, at the rail when the ship's doctor, carrying his black bag, went down the steps to the motor boat, into which one of the boys was busy loading fruit, bottles of lemonade, and a couple of big blocks of ice.

"What's the ice for?" she called down from above, and when Van Dommelen told her, she rolled her eyes to heaven in horror. "Good heavens! D'you mean to say they haven't even got a refrigerator?"

Van Dommelen came to the Controleur's house along an avenue of heavily fragrant tamarind trees, under which a few small, inconspicuous huts were hidden. "Hullo, there!" he called, pausing near the front verandah, which had been furnished in an attempt at Dutch cosiness—an old Brabant shawl spread out on the wall, a few Delft tiles and decorative plates hung up, a reproduction

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of a painting by Pieter de Hooch in an oak frame. Between the white columns supporting the roof, pieces of tree bark draped with flowering orchids had been suspended with loving care.

The Doctor felt sure they must have heard him coming, in the silence in and around the house. The young mistress, a little sensitive about her condition, probably wanted to put on a loose kimono and some make-up before she appeared on the scene.

He remembered seeing her the last time the ship had called there, when she had come aboard with her husband—a gentle, friendly little creature, excited by all the new white faces, and rather embarrassed by the deference shown to her. The Captain, the First Mate, and he had had a delightful conversation with Mrs. Vermeer, in the course of which they had seen how brave she was.

"Hullo!" he called again. "Is anyone at home?"

No answer. Warm, drowsy silence, broken at intervals by the distant rattling of the winch. He decided to ascend without further ado the few steps to the front verandah and stretch himself out in one of the cane rocking-chairs that stood there so invitingly. He hung his pith helmet on the hall-stand, as befitted a guest who knew how to behave; put his bag down on the glass top of the round table, which was already occupied by a three-legged wooden horse on wheels—a crippled Rosinante belonging to Harry; and sat down. He carefully extracted a cigar from his case and bit off the end.

At that moment the door suddenly opened, and Marie, the midwife, came out on the verandah—a grey-haired, dark-skinned little woman, whose energetic, enterprising spirit was written all over her.

"Oh, it's you, Doctor!" she exclaimed, with obvious pleasure at seeing him, and went on in her rather quaint Dutch: "You've come just at the right time! I was on the point to go aboard to zay to you—" her voice dropped to a whisper—"to zay to you that I don't altogether trust . . ."

"Have the pains already begun?" he asked.

She nodded. "Last night, but zhe doesn't want the Controleur to know, zhe wants the child to come while he's on board the zhip! But you can't hurry Nature, can you? And I'm afraid it lies the wrong way up . . ."

Van Dommelen was already on his feet and had taken his bag of instruments from the table, stubbing out in the ashtray the cigar he had just lit with so much pleasure. And as he followed the Amboinese midwife into the house, he could not help thinking for a moment: if this becomes a difficult confinement, from which I can't and won't run away—what's to be done about the departure of the *Bontekoe*, presently?

Shortly before noon the policeman brought the Captain a letter. The latter was on the point of having the siren blown for the Doctor, who must have forgotten the time again in convivial conversation on shore—it wasn't the first occasion, either. In some irritation, he read: *Can't possibly leave. Child out of position.*

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"Child out of position," muttered Hoekstra aloud, at first rather incredulous. "And he thinks I'll stay and wait for him here! Has he lost his flaming wits?"

He considered for a moment how much time there was to spare, at the very outside. He was sorry for that poor girl on shore, but nobody could expect him to risk his ship by sailing at night through this region of islands, islets, and submerged coral reefs, which was dangerous enough in broad daylight, and through which, in addition, strong, treacherous currents raced at the turn of the tide. So he scribbled on a scrap of paper: *I give you till one o'clock exactly. Doubt whether that'll be any use to you, but I can't do more, I've got my orders.*

Towards one—he was already beginning to wonder whether perhaps Van Dommelen had simply ignored his note—the motor boat came chugging out again. He bent over the rail. But the policeman, who evidently had no good news for him, thought it better to avoid his furious, searching look.

After having made the little boat fast, he came up the ladder, meekly doffed his martial straw hat, and reported: "*Tuan dokter bilang, dija tida tahu*—the Doctor says he doesn't know."

"What doesn't he know?"

"He doesn't know when the child will arrive."

Hoekstra uttered something very, very rude, and the policeman deemed it prudent unobtrusively to make himself scarce.

At that moment lunch was announced. A Javanese boy, dressed in a white uniform and a batik turban, sauntered along the deck on bare feet, vigorously beating a gong and taking childish pleasure in the brazen harmony that hummed, clear and lively, through the silence which now hung round the ship, since the proas had gone back to the shore and the steam winch had closed down. The much-tried Captain sighed, pondered for a few minutes, then went to the cabin aft of the bridge.

The young official looked up, appalled, from his papers. "What? Is it twelve o'clock already? I've only got through half of them!"

The innocence of this exclamation disarmed Hoekstra. "My dear Controleur, it's long past twelve o'clock—in fact, the gong's just gone for lunch."

"Good lord! Then I'll have to be off. Where's Harry?"

"Oh, there's no need to rush away this time. I just came to ask whether you'd care to have something to eat with us?" Hoekstra was amazed himself at the patient serenity in his voice.

"What? Mustn't you be going, then?" Vermeer asked.

The other shook his head and lied coolly. "I've just heard something's gone wrong in the engine-room. It may be"—it cost him quite a lot to say this—"it may be early tomorrow morning before we leave."

"Early tomorrow morning!" echoed the young man, in unconcealed delight. Then he saw the Captain's sombre face.

"I can understand *you* don't find it so pleasant, Captain, but for me . . .! Only, what a pity it is Lisa can't . . ."

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"Yes, it is a pity," Hoekstra agreed—with a mighty effort.

"Anyway, thank you very much for the invitation! I'll just make a quick dash to the shore to tell my wife I shan't . . ."

"Oh, you needn't bother about that," said the Captain quickly.

"Have you let her know already then?"

Hoekstra nodded.

He went down below immediately to give everybody in the saloon the tip that the Controleur thought the postponement of the vessel's departure was due to trouble in the engine-room, and that they shouldn't be so silly as to ask where Dr. Van Dommelen had got to. In more circumspect words he addressed the same request—not to be surprised at the absence of the Doctor—to Mrs. Wurtzel, who in the past had shown a quite exceptional aptitude for asking questions at the wrong time. Mrs. Wurtzel warm-heartedly promised co-operation.

The steward showed the guest to the empty chair of Doctor Van Dommelen, between Mrs. Wurtzel and her young niece. Harry, his little son, sat proudly next to the Captain, on a chair that had the seat raised up with cushions. The European-style lunch—iced grapefruit, lobster, roast beef with pommes sautées and fresh vegetables, four different sorts of cheese, and dessert and Mocha coffee to follow—was a dream.

Vermeer was a little put out at first by having to talk English on two sides at once. But the Captain's hock worked wonders: after the second or third glass of Niersteiner, its crystal frosted over with bubbles, Vermeer's English ran as fluently as if he had spoken nothing else since he was born. He noticed that he even seemed to have the accent right for once; Lisa ought to hear him rattling away as he was this afternoon!

He addressed himself to the charming young American lady on his left, who proved to be genuinely interested in his life there and his task as upholder of the authority of the Crown.

Like her aunt, Mrs. Wurtzel, Patricia was very much taken with her new partner at table. She studied him coolly, and at the same time seductively, with the frank eyes of a wealthy American girl, and forgot for the time being her Second Engineer, who was sitting at the end of the table, rather sulky and noticeably silent that afternoon. Or had she not really forgotten him, and did she only want to make him a bit jealous? She didn't know herself.

Harry had no less success than his father. Jauntily perched on his throne of cushions beside his friend the Captain, he chattered away nineteen to the dozen—a miniature copy of papa. He, too, proved to be a person of importance here in this island kingdom, back of the Moluccas. At home, he said, he had a real fort with soldiers, a box of bricks, and a wooden horse on wheels—the horse was rather sick at the moment . . . Everyone listened to him, even the two American ladies, who could not understand a word of his Dutch mixed with Malay. He was served by the Javanese boy behind his chair with as much ceremonious solemnity as if he had been a very important grown-up. And the Chief Engineer asked

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Harry whether he wouldn't care to come down to the engine-room presently, to help him with a screw which would no longer turn, no matter how hard he tugged at it . . .

A delightful lunch, thought the Controleur—a delicious treat after months of solitude . . . of solitude with Lisa, of course. His conscience pricked him afresh—*he* was all right here, drinking, cosily chatting, smoking a cigar.

At the same time, he was vaguely aware that the presence close to him of this young American girl excited him more than he could justify to that same conscience of his.

Suddenly an idea came to him, and he voiced it immediately: "Captain, if you're going to lie here till tomorrow morning anyway, would it be possible for the Doctor just . . ." He looked round the room; for the first time he missed the Doctor's presence at table.

"Where's the Doctor?" he asked in surprise.

The response to his question was a rather embarrassed silence. Then the Captain said gently: "He's already with her."

Vermeer did not understand at first; perhaps the wine had gone to his head a little. The Doctor was with Lisa—and nobody had told him. Why?

"Has it begun already, then?" he asked quickly, putting together in a flash: the casual invitation to stay to lunch on board, because something was said to have gone wrong with the engines; and the absence of the Doctor from the lunch-table . . .

The Captain told him that it would be best to stay sitting quietly where he was, for he would only be a nuisance at home anyway, and, with the skilled assistance of Doctor Van Dommelen, everything would be certain to go well.

But the young Controleur slowly rose from his chair, strangely pale of a sudden; setting down his cigar in the ashtray in a not altogether successful attempt at self-control, he left the saloon, stammering an excuse.

"Is Daddy going home?" asked Harry, sliding down from his cushions. Suddenly even he was unwilling to remain on board a moment longer, in spite of the big portion of strawberry ice which the Javanese boy had just put in front of him.

The hours went by. The Controleur's house lay still and shining white under the trees which overshadowed it; there was nothing about its peaceful exterior to hint at the battle which was being fought inside. The flag hung drooping from the flagstaff in the front compound, against a sky no breath of wind disturbed.

In the Captain's cabin of the *Bontekoe*, Hoekstra thought darkly of the row he was going to have with the owners, who—with all due respect, of course, for his humanity towards the wife of a petty official in a very remote group of islands—would ask him whether he had gone right off his head in wilfully letting his ship lie idle at anchor, to the detriment of the company's interests. And if, by way of excuse, he should plead the disobedience of the ship's

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doctor, as he had momentarily intended to do, the owners would draw the obvious conclusion: he, the so-called master of the vessel, had no authority over his subordinates. He, and he alone would get all the blame, instead of that blasted obstinate mule of a Van Dommelen!

When, towards five o'clock, he saw Mrs. Wurtzel emerge from her cabin, refreshed and talkative after her siesta, and looking around for someone to keep her company in place of Van Dommelen, he deemed the moment had come to go on shore himself and see how things stood.

The Controleur's motor launch proved to be moored alongside the pier, so Hoekstra gave orders for a boat to be lowered. He was surprised to hear that this had already been done; it seemed that his Second Engineer—who had also apparently begun to rule the roost—had had himself rowed to the shore with Mrs. Wurtzel's niece in order to show her a sixteenth-century Portuguese fort which was somewhere in the neighbourhood. "Just wait, my lad; I'll give you what-for presently," growled Hoekstra, as he went down the ship's ladder into the boat.

The Javanese and Menadese oarsmen sensed his fury, with the delicate instinct for such things that the oriental possesses; and they endeavoured, by an exaggerated show of zeal, to prevent the storm from bursting over their own innocent heads. After having pushed off from the ship and jumped back into their places with catlike agility, they pulled at the oars as one man: you might have thought they wished for no greater privilege than to be allowed to row their Captain to land at the hottest time of the day. And it softened him, even though he saw through their little comedy.

But Van Dommelen proved to be a great deal less docile. When, having kept the Captain waiting, he at last emerged from the sick-room, it was to tell him that, to his regret, the business still showed no signs of making progress, and that he had to remain where he was in order to operate if necessary. It went without saying that he would operate only in the very last resort, badly equipped and practically devoid of surgical experience as he was. For the present, he pinned his hopes on Marie, who was a gem, a woman in a thousand: she had golden fingers . . .

Doctor Van Dommelen would have gone on singing the praises of his incomparable Amboinese if Hoekstra had not angrily cut him short: "I hope you'll be able to tell me one thing, at least—do you think you'll be on board tomorrow morning early, or not?"

"I'm no clairvoyant, after all," said the other coolly, with even a hint of haughtiness in his voice. "It's a slow job. But let's hope for the best." And he sighed, weary from his hours of hard work in the noonday heat. "You can take it from me, no one will be more pleased than I am if the whole thing's over by daybreak tomorrow."

They had walked up the side compound together, so as to talk without being overheard by the Controleur, who, however, could no longer keep himself in check, and got up and followed them,

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his eyes wide with anxiety for his wife. The Doctor caught sight of him and managed to put on a tone of professional heartiness: " It takes time, Controleur, but there's no reason whatever for you to worry. We're getting on, we're getting on . . . just a little patience."

" Provided I know that Lisa's life . . . But you said there's no danger, didn't you, Doctor? "

" Danger, danger . . . there's always *some* danger, but just you stay calm, and leave the affair to us. What do you want it to be? I haven't even asked your wife that yet! Another boy? Or a girl, for a change? "

" A girl," said Vermeer, tonelessly, with trembling lips; it sounded as if he was simply repeating mechanically the Doctor's last words.

" Oh, if only she comes through all right, nothing else matters! " he burst out. He turned to Hoekstra. " Captain, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for allowing the Doctor to help us. I can understand how trying it is for you to have to hang around here with your ship, waiting . . ."

Hoekstra was at a loss for an answer; what the young man said about him was only too true. This homage and thanks rendered to his humanity embarrassed him; it was going to make it even harder for him to stick to his guns the following morning. As he had to do. As the stern voice of duty prescribed.

In order to impress on the young man, in gentle, tactful fashion, the inexorable nature of that duty, he said: " I've given the Doctor till tomorrow morning. That's another twelve hours in which to show what he can do."

" Oh, but surely it'll have arrived by then? " exclaimed the young husband, looking in panic at the Doctor. Van Dommelen avoided his gaze.

Hoekstra took a deep breath. He was not very good at coping with this sort of thing. His heart became even more dangerously soft when Harry came running up to him. The little boy was helping the old gardener—whose long sickle now lay idle on the lawn—to water the palm trees in their tubs; he came struggling up with a petrol-tin full of water, from which he managed to splash a good deal over the shoes of his friend the Captain in the exuberance of his greeting.

But Hoekstra's sentimental mood disappeared in a second when he met his Second Engineer on the jetty, waiting for him beside the boat. This young man had come back from his walk with the American girl, and would probably have made no bones about having them both cheerfully rowed back to the ship, if the dusky sailors had not called his attention to the fact that the Captain might quite easily return unexpectedly, and would perhaps have something to say if his boat happened to be lying alongside the *Bontekoe* at that moment.

Patricia, still warm from the walk, came up to Hoekstra, in all her flushed young glory. " Oh, Cappie, it was wonderful! " she

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gushed, putting in a tacit plea for her escort, who had had a boat lowered for her on his own authority and had just heard from the oarsmen that the skipper was in none too good a mood. " It was simply fantastic . . . exactly like a fairy story! "

" I'll see you on the bridge presently," said Hoekstra coldly to his Second Engineer, listening meanwhile with polite interest to what Miss Patricia Dixon had to tell him.

" Completely hidden in the forest—half covered with the most gorgeous flowers—trees grown right through the walls, just like that—oh, and look what Jimmy found for me! "

Until then Hoekstra had not been aware that his Second Engineer was called Jimmy—he only knew him under the good old Dutch name of Jaap van Dintel. He cast a pulverizing look at the wretched youth, and glanced at the stone cannon-ball which Van Dintel proved to be holding in the hollow of his hand and now showed him, shrinkingly.

" Fancy . . . that was the sort of thing they fired at each other in the old days! " Patricia marvelled. She turned, all seductiveness, to her guide of the afternoon, who brought up the rear. " And you've promised me, haven't you, that if we stay here tomorrow as well, we'll be going to see the ruins of that palace, or whatever it was, in which only snakes and owls and so forth still live? "

" Tomorrow we'll be at sea," Hoekstra affirmed—by now hopping mad, as Patricia would have said.

On which Patricia turned in surprise and clapped her hands. " Splendid! So the baby's arrived, then? "

The Captain averted his face, tight-lipped; she realized her mistake. And the Javanese and Menadese rowers, exchanging a silent look with each other, dipped their oars and rowed as one man, with all their might.

The wigging Hoekstra gave his Second Engineer was the hottest he had given anyone for a very long time.

In the lighted front verandah of his house, now half in darkness, the young Controleur walked up and down, up and down.

Shortly before the first light of dawn, the little motor boat came chugging out again. Looking through his night-glasses, Hoekstra assured himself that there was nobody in it except the policeman. The man brought him a hastily scribbled note in Van Dommelen's unreadable handwriting: *Can you send me a change of clothes? Getting gradually unfit for society.*

Slightly more than a quarter of an hour later, the Captain confronted the insubordinate ship's doctor in the garden at the side of the house, which was still not yet light.

" Thanks for the detailed report on the situation you've just sent me. But now I should like to know just one thing more: will the baby arrive this morning or not? "

Van Dommelen looked as sleepless, weary, and unshaven as his skipper.

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"That depends on her, not on me. Up till now she's done splendidly, but towards the end she was exhausted, and I've had to let her sleep a few hours. I'm going to give her another injection soon, and we'll see how far she manages to get this time."

Hoekstra thought of the confinements his own wife Dora had had to endure, and hardened himself against memories rising within him.

"Listen, Doctor, I've given you a lot of rope—more than I should have done. As a last favour I'll wait till twelve o'clock. But at twelve o'clock precisely I'm weighing anchor, no matter how things stand here. Is that understood?"

"You can do what you damned well like," said the Doctor sourly. "You know your duty. I know mine."

"It's your duty to be aboard the vessel the owners have engaged you to serve on. You're under contract; you seem to forget that."

"All I know is, I'm not leaving this woman to her fate."

"But she's got someone to help her, hasn't she?"

"Not if it's necessary to operate."

"Can't you operate *now*?"

The question had burst from him in despair, against his better judgment, and the Doctor gave him a straight answer. "Sure—let's go to it! Bloodthirsty, aren't you? Heaven help her if I should really have to do it! As long as there's even the faintest chance of her pulling it off without that, I'd sooner spare her the pleasure!"

Hoekstra tried again with another argument: "You realize, I hope, that you'll be stranded here for a couple of months if you decide to stay behind?"

"I've always been keen on botany," the Doctor reassured him. "Would you like me to tell that to the owners in Surabaya?"

Van Dommelen grimly shrugged his shoulders. "The owners can go to hell," he said disrespectfully. "The whole world can go to hell, you and your ship too, if you really have the face to sail away without me. I'm staying *here*, where I'm needed. I'm a doctor, not a contract coolie—tell the owners that. And now I hope you'll excuse me if I go back to my patient."

He turned on his heel and disappeared into the house.

Hoekstra, white with rage, went back to the jetty with great strides. The Controleur watched him in silence from the front verandah. The sound of excited, angry voices from the side of the house had not escaped him, and he thought it best to avoid, for the time being, the master of the *Bontekoe*, still lying at anchor out there.

"I'll pay him out for that one day, the bloody sawbones!" Hoekstra bellowed aloud. In the trees above his head the first birds awoke, startled by the strange noise; clear, loud, flute-like tones preluded the dawn orchestra of tropical nature, shortly to burst out in its full glory, sonorous, triumphant.

He chose to take breakfast on the bridge, in order not to have to meet his passengers. He was just trying to forget his troubles in a

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nap when Miss Dixon appeared on the bridge, in one of her many audacious summer dresses, and astonished him with the airy confession: "Cappie, it was all *my* fault!"

He had not even the remotest idea what she had in mind. She saw his rather disconcerted face, and went on to explain: "I pestered Jimmy to go ashore with me yesterday and show me that funny old fort, and when he said you were taking a rest up above, or were sitting writing a letter, or both, or doing something else, I don't know what, then I said you'd be sure not to mind, and that he was to lower a boat—on my responsibility."

"I'll forgive you," he said, smiling sourly.

"You forgive *me*, but you punish Jimmy!" she exclaimed, her voice full of the injustice of it. "I had been looking forward so much to seeing the old palace as well today—and now Jimmy's not allowed to leave the ship!"

"My dear Miss Dixon—"

"Oh, just call me Pat," she interrupted engagingly.

"My dear Miss Pat, then, you can't go ashore, because if the Doctor comes back before twelve o'clock I'm leaving at once."

It took a minute for this to sink in. "And suppose it's later?"

"What do you mean, later?" he asked, uncomfortably.

"Well, if he doesn't come by midday, and we have to stay here this afternoon?"

"I'm sorry about your excursion to the ruins, Miss Pat—but *whatever* happens, I'm leaving at twelve o'clock at the latest."

"And that poor woman on shore, then?" she said, startled and impressed by his emphatic tone. "Or is the Doctor perhaps staying with her?"

He chose not to answer this question. But she immediately recollected: "But then we've got no doctor on board!"

"No."

Fresh silence. Patricia understood that she would be wise not to go further into this point at the moment. "Auntie will be sorry about that—I mean, in connection with her bridge," she continued unexpectedly.

Hoekstra made a gesture of helplessness, and Patricia went. With the charming, carefree, dancing steps she loved to take, and a fleeting laugh for the fair-haired Second Mate, who had been watching her covertly the whole time from the chart-room, where he had been ostensibly engrossed in a book on tides and currents.

"What's the time?" asked Hoekstra in the direction of the chart-room. The Second Mate glanced at the clock and replied: "Three minutes to twelve, Captain."

Hoekstra bent over the engine-room speaking-tube. "Have you got enough steam up for sailing?"

"Yes, Captain." It was the voice of the Second Engineer.

"It's three minutes to twelve up here. Do you make it that too?"

And when another confirmatory answer came, he gave the order: "Blow off at twelve o'clock."

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" Blow off at twelve o'clock," the voice below repeated.

The skipper padded to and fro with heavy, measured steps, now and then casting a glance at the verandah of the white house on shore, where the Controleur, with a self-discipline no less painfully achieved than his own, sat bent over his mail.

The Captain's heavy boots tramped up and down the bridge. From down below droned a monotonous sound that came and went, came and went again—the voice of Mrs. Wurtzel, who had evidently found a fresh target for her interminable monologue. The fair-haired Second Mate in the chart-room, his eyes fixed on the clock as though hypnotized, pricked up his ears . . .

Then the *Bontekoe*'s siren blared deafeningly. The whole ship shook with the sound. A couple of seagulls which were bobbing up and down on the water near the afterdeck, waiting for refuse from the cook's galley, spread their wings and flew away, their affrighted screams lost in the din. A dense flock of red and green parakeets fluttered up from the tamarind trees of the little avenue near the jetty; the screeching uproar with which they voiced the scare they had received did not become audible until the bellow of the siren ceased as though cut off with a knife, echoing only for a moment from the distant hills, while nothing but a wisp of cloud, purest white against the azure sky, told of what had happened.

The sombre, deep drone of the siren, piercing all who heard it to the marrow of their bones, had a strangely liberating effect on Captain Hoekstra.

With cruel satisfaction, he noticed the panic that seized the young Controleur, who sprang out of his chair and ran in a frenzy to knock at the central door of the long, low bungalow.

Hoekstra waited now for the two blasts which, in menacing climax, would follow in a minute's time. Would Van Dommelen climb down after all, in spite of his big talk?

Below, on the main deck, silence had fallen. In speechless amazement the passengers looked at each other; at last Mrs. Wurtzel asked sceptically: " He's not sailing without the Doctor, is he? "

Captain Hoekstra could not hear what else she said, after her niece Patricia had assured her that it was only too definitely the Captain's intention to leave without the Doctor.

Nor was he in the bungalow on shore, to see how the young woman there, fighting for her life and for her child's, struggled to raise her face, covered with sweat, from the pillows in which she had sunk down exhausted, and whispered in mortal fear: " Doctor . . . Doctor . . . the ship's going away! "

And he did not hear how that same doctor answered coolly: " Doesn't matter, my dear, don't pay any attention to it."

Two powerful, long-drawn-out blasts rent with their bellowing the stillness of the tropical morning. And now Harry, in his white playsuit, came running down to the jetty, and began to spring into the air like a little Red Indian and wave his arms in salutation,

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because he realized that his special friend the Captain was on the point of leaving him again for a long time.

In a few minutes, after the third and last blast, Hoekstra would order his First Mate, who was already waiting on the fore-deck with a handful of sailors, to man the winch and weigh the anchor. Once that had happened, he would pull down the handle to " half steam ahead " with a firm hand, and set the course for the Madurese at the wheel.

Suddenly one of the cabin stewards came running up the stairs to the bridge.

" *Tuan Kapten! Nyonya ada sakit!* "

Hoekstra stared at the bearer of evil tidings, who had brought him this message that " Madam was sick."

" *Nyonya derri hut nommer dua* . . . the lady in Cabin Number Two," the boy added, as if there were more ladies on board, besides Mrs. Wurtzel, who had picked just this moment to be ill. It was obvious now that he would not be able to leave without a doctor on board.

" I'm coming," he said to the boy, who slipped below again on noiseless, naked feet, concealing his tremendous delight in what was going on under a masterly show of concern.

Before following him, Hoekstra bent once more over the mouthpiece of the engine-room speaking-tube; he was astonished himself by the laconic, almost amused note in his voice. " Van Dintel? "

" Yes, Captain."

" Don't bother about that third blast."

" Don't bother, Captain? "

" That's what I said, didn't I? " And he pushed the plug into the tube, so as not to hear any silly objections.

" Your Aunt's not feeling well, I hear? " said Hoekstra to Miss Patricia Dixon. Pat informed him, a trifle sulkily, that Mrs. Wurtzel had, in point of fact, suddenly felt unwell, and had retired to bed.

" I'll have the Doctor fetched immediately," he promised.

This conversation took place outside Mrs. Wurtzel's cabin on the promenade deck, and her languishing voice sounded through the slats of the door: " There's no hurry—just ask the Doctor to come as soon as he can be spared on shore."

" I'm sorry, Mrs. Wurtzel," said Hoekstra rather sharply, " but you're feeling ill, and Doctor Van Dommelen is ship's doctor on this vessel, so I'll see to it that he comes to you at once."

He scrawled a few words on a slate and sent a boy ashore with it. While he was waiting for Van Dommelen to appear, the rudiments of a cunning plan formed in his mind.

But instead of Van Dommelen, only the boy came back, and on the fragment of slate was written: *What's wrong with the old so-and-so then?*

Hoekstra felt that the Doctor was really going a bit too far this

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time, and he went ashore himself. A little later he was standing, filled with righteous indignation, in front of the undutiful Van Dommelen, who received him with contemptuous words.

"Did you really think I'd fall for that one?"

"What one?"

"I'm sorry, Captain, but I've seen through it. Once you had me on board again, you'd up with the anchor and sail away. Wasn't that it? Wasn't that your little game?"

Hoekstra indignantly denied the base allegation. "I tell you she's ill!"

"Oh, what's up with her, then?"

"How do I know? Is it my job to diagnose the patient's case, or yours?"

"All right, all right, but what does she complain of?"

"I haven't seen her myself; she's in bed in her cabin. One of the boys came to tell me that she didn't feel well. And that's the only reason why I didn't leave just now, as I fully intended to do."

Van Dommelen looked at him thoughtfully with tired eyes. "You mean . . . with a sick passenger on board . . . and no doctor . . . you didn't dare to sail away?"

"Your conclusion shows remarkable powers of logic," snarled Hoekstra.

"All right, Captain, I'm coming . . . but not yet," he added, destroying once more the effect of his promise. "Let her niece take her temperature and jot the symptoms down on a slate."

The Captain returned to the ship without the Doctor.

Patricia, ready at once to lend her co-operation, disappeared into her Aunt's cabin. When she came to give the Captain the slate later on, Mrs. Wurtzel's symptoms were found to be severe headache and constipation, palpitations and shortness of breath—the patient's temperature stood on record as 103°.

"A hundred and three!" shouted Hoekstra.

"High fever," Patricia blandly informed him.

On the slate, which was kept busy travelling to and fro, the Doctor prescribed a mild laxative for his patient on board, but the afternoon waned without his putting in an appearance.

Patricia allowed herself to be rowed ashore under the escort of Berends, the fair-haired Second Mate. In tender consolation she waved from the boat to her Jimmy, who was confined to the ship this afternoon as well, and had hypocritically wished them a pleasant trip; in fact, he was gnashing his teeth with envy of the lucky dog whose privilege it was to show her the ruined palace hidden in the forest, and who had first come to ask him the whereabouts of the bloody thing. He would dearly have liked to send them in the wrong direction! Would she let Berends take her in his arms and kiss her as easily and carelessly as she had let *him* the day before?

They did not come back until shortly before nightfall, and it seemed to him that Pat avoided his glance. She did not say much

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about the ruins, but Berends became decidedly lyrical about them; he drivelled away—that it had been just like something out of a fairy tale—a Sleeping Beauty's castle in the green shadow of the forest—lizards had sat and sunned themselves on the old, weather-worn stones, between which flowers grew. Really, though, it had been so exquisitely still, not even any birds—only a butterfly or two, with big, brightly coloured wings.

"Oh yes, I can imagine exactly what it was like!" sneered Jimmy—and the idiotic Berends betrayed himself by blushing a deep, dark red.

Mrs. Wurtzel called to her niece to come to her. She wanted to know how she had got on on shore with the Second Mate. There was nothing more tiresome than being ill, she complained.

The hours crept on. Darkness fell, and the old gardener lit the oil lamps, after having, in company with Harry, watered the palms in their pots along the side of the Controleur's house.

At table, the Chief Engineer and the First Mate voiced their uneasiness over the long, enforced delay. Until now they had not liked to say anything, sorry as they were for that poor girl on shore—but how was all this to end?

Hoekstra said that he didn't know himself. The ridiculous business would probably cost him his job . . .

"But haven't the owners any heart at all?" asked the First Mate indignantly. The Engineer could only laugh pityingly at such an idea, and Hoekstra affirmed: "My lad, where we've got a heart, the owners have a money-bag."

Tired out, resigned, he stood for a while on deck before turning in. A heaven glittering with stars, filled with mystery, domed the vast tropical sea. The ocean stretched to infinity, a softly phosphorescent glow, in which his *Bontekoe*, of which he was so very proud, floated lost, a nutshell in the hand of destiny. The white house standing lit up on the dark mass of land was another such dot in the endlessness of creation. But for the Controleur, for his wife in the throes of labour, for the doctor involved in those throes, that house was a world, just as this vessel, with the people on it, seemed a world to him, Peter Cornelius Hoekstra.

This evening he saw for the first time, with new, wide-open eyes, the insignificance of it all. The insignificance of his whole life and of all earthly greatness, of the apparent omnipotence of the dreaded owners at Head Office in Batavia, where he would have to answer for himself.

Destiny was mightier than the little men whose lives it governed; it was also mightier even than Head Office in Batavia—in this thought, in the hour of his moral defeat, lay something reconciling, even moving.

Destiny governed the lives of men; and so it ordained that the following morning the brave young wife of the Controleur should win triumphantly her long-drawn-out and desperately hard struggle. Her husband, who had fallen asleep shortly before day-

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break in the same chair in which he had answered all his letters, was startled into wakefulness by a new sound—a high shrill cry.

He sprang to his feet, staggering, dazed with sleep, tore open the middle door and tottered into the bedroom. He threw himself on his knees beside his Lisa, who lay in bed, pale but safely delivered, while the Doctor and Marie bent over the table, from which came a tiny, wavering, helpless voice.

"A girl," said the Doctor. "That was what you wanted, wasn't it? You can take a look at her, and then you'll have to leave the room again, because your wife needs rest."

"Oh Doctor! Marie! Oh God!" wept the young man, looking at his child without seeing anything. And he obediently allowed the dusky Amboinese to lead him outside again.

"Now, now, don't be nervous. Everything's all right, isn't it? Your wife's been so brave—such a bad time she's had, poor thing! Now, now, it doesn't matter any more . . . over, all over . . ." Marie comforted him like a mother.

A quarter of an hour later, Doctor Van Dommelen sent a note to the Captain: *Congratulations, your troubles are over. A girl—nearly eight pounds. Aren't you proud? I must just wait a little to see how things are with the mother, but it looks as if we shall be able to leave before noon.*

In a twinkling, the whole ship knew about it. The Chief Engineer went down to make sure in person that the boilers had sufficient pressure up. Hoekstra awoke as if from a strange dream. All his wise resignation of the evening before fell from him as he began to calculate feverishly how much lost time he might still be able to make up by sailing more quickly and by loading and discharging in record time at the next ports of call. He hoped to recover one lost day in any case.

Thanks to the good news—plus the gentle laxative she had taken on doctor's orders—Mrs. Wurtzel felt so much better that she was able to appear on deck again, lively and loquacious as ever.

Towards ten o'clock the little motor boat came puffing out from the jetty. In it stood the Doctor and the Controleur, and it would have been difficult to say which of the two looked more in need of sleep and a shave. But both of them laughed through all their weariness. Naturally, Harry was in the party too, and could not contain his excitement, even from some distance off.

"I've got a little sister!" he called across the water, in his high, clear, child's voice.

"Oh?" everyone marvelled.

"Yes, but she's still small. No bigger than . . ." He held up his little hands.

The Controleur climbed the ladder along with the Doctor, in order to thank the Captain personally, and to tender his apologies left and right, which were brushed aside with good-hearted gestures, as if the passengers would have waited another week with pleasure for the happy event, if that had been necessary.

"I thought you were ill in bed?" said Doctor Van Dommelen

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to Mrs. Wurtzel, who heard with satisfaction the new tone of liking in his voice.

"I *was* ill. But to see you back on board is enough to cure anyone! By the way, Doctor—you could do with a shave."

Laughing, he stroked his stubbly chin. "Maybe you're right," he answered, and made off in the direction of his cabin.

"And don't forget, Doctor, I'm counting on you presently at bridge!"

"I need some sleep," he protested feebly, but knew that he could not possibly get out of it. One good turn deserved another.

And then the steam winch began to hiss and clank, and the anchor-chain began to rattle. The young Controleur hurried down the ladder with his son, to the boat, into which some more blocks of ice had been loaded by way of a farewell present.

Holding Harry by one hand, and keeping the sun off his face with the other, he looked up, from eyes that, though black-ringed, were happy, at Pat, who had just given him another of those sweet glances which had such a strangely disturbing effect on him, in spite of Lisa and his new-born daughter.

She smiled enigmatically down at him, and the fair-haired Second Mate, who was supervising the pulling up of the ladder, saw it by chance and was jealous.

Suddenly remembering the Captain, to whom he had given so much trouble, the Controleur turned his gaze to the bridge. Just at that moment Hoekstra happened to bend over the rail to see whether the motor boat was clear yet. His eyes met those of the young official, and he grinned good-naturedly, with an expression on his face which seemed to say: "If you know anything *else* to muck up my schedule, you—"

By now the anchor had been weighed. Still dripping, it rested in the hawse-hole, and the screw began to rotate, churning up brown eddies of mud from the bottom. And the siren saluted the land with one long, droning blast, which caused the old gardener to turn round on the lawn, and break off his work to watch the departure of the *Kapal Puteh*, the Great White Boat.

The vessel sailed away, at first slowly, then at a quicker pace. After describing a wide arc across the unruffled surface of the sea, it shaped its course for the south. And in the motor boat, waving with all their might, stood the Controleur and his little boy—two white figures, growing steadily smaller, against the background of that green, forgotten island, back of the Moluccas.

★ ★ ★

O WILD WEST WIND!

A farmer once called his cow "Zephyr;"
She seemed such an amiable hephyr.
When the farmer drew near,
She kicked off his ear,
Which made him considerably dephyr.

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

BRAVE OLD WORLD

"Great craftsmen," he said, "for all their excruciating morals"

by MARTIN JORDAN

MY name is Till Fagan, and nobody is going to read this. I'm writing it as work-therapeutics. It's going straight down the waste-chute.

I don't mind confessing two things. One, I have faltered in my duty to Holy Das. Two, I have been attracted physically by the photograph of a female who was alive about five hundred years ago.

I am an antique dealer. I make my living out of the craze for pre-plastic objects.

There was a market for pre-plasts even before father was a boy. He told me that my old grandad remembered the digging-up of Holborn Viaduct after four centuries and three H-bombs, and how the salvaged artefacts filled the British Museum.

I'm a bit of a social historian myself—antique dealers have to be—so I know something of man's crazes for artefacts through the ages. The stuff that sells big today is mostly mid-twentieth century, but the people way back in that century used to pay the earth for stuff still older, mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The present will always rush to buy up bits of the past, as long as it's the bit of the past that happens to be in fashion. Don't ask me why. It's my living, that's all I'm interested in.

But I do think that more people than ever go in for antiques. Perhaps it's because the past was so lax by our moral standards, and it gives people a thrill to be surrounded by twentieth-century artefacts. After all, to have a respectable household, regulation hair-shirts, and a portrait of Holy Das in every room, and to know that the saucepan-lid on the wall was used by people who travelled promiscuously in "public" transports or even bathed in the sea with members of the opposite sex—that, I think, does appeal to an unfortunate streak in many of us.

Well, let's get the incident down on paper, and then let's destroy the manuscript.

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I learnt by street visor that Controller Marcus V. Kronig was due from Delhi on a shopping expedition. I stood high in the Beautifactions—it was all printed after my name in *Soul's Who*: Rabindranath Das Medal (Third Class) for record chastity, certificated non-drinker and vegetarian, three Mortification Badges, including the Stylites Star for six months' contemplation on top of Blackpool Tower. So I was not surprised when I got a summons to attend the Controller at the Groschester Caravanserai in Park Lane.

London is not Delhi—it's a long, long way from the centre of things—but it still knows how to honour a visiting Controller. Across the street in the park, under the west windows of the Caravanserai, a crowd of flagellants were singing and mortifying themselves. A number of ecstatics had chained themselves to the railings and one or two were already in trance.

I was shown into the lift and up to the Controller's suite. Within the Society of Das, Kronig belonged to the Democratic Order. He met me man-to-man, with a firm handshake and the quiet greeting, " May your flesh perish."

He was a big man, an American, with a smooth, red face and rimless glasses. As appropriate to the Democratic Order, he wore an ordinary zipper-suit with a full string of one thousand four hundred and sixty-one Das beads round his neck; and the only sign of his status was the little cloth-of-gold apron that fell from the waist halfway to the knees.

" Mr. Fagan," he said, when I had made my obeisance, " I guess you've heard of my collection. Next to that of the Most Macerated Daughter of Das, Mrs. Cyrus K. Leary of New York, it is the biggest in North America. I anticipate you've seen it on the visocasts . . ."

I had, and it was terrific. Among his Early American Electricals was the famous Brooklyn Toaster, the only model of its kind in the world. His collection of electric-light bulbs was insured, they said, for half a million credits. His gas-pipes alone would have filled an exhibition.

" Of course," he went on, " Britain is the home of pre-plasts. It isn't often I manage to get here, but when I do, I expect to take something special back with me."

I said, " Mr. Controller, you won't be disappointed."

It was true what he said about Britain being the home of pre-plasts. Way back in the twenty-first century you couldn't have found a brick or a wooden chair in the civilized world, except in Britain. No wonder the country dripped antiques.

" As a matter of fact," I went on, " I have something rather special. Did you ever hear of the Hammersmith Council House?"

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" I did," he answered. " It's one of the few intact Pre-plastic Dwellings."

" I've bought it," I said.

He stared. " The whole house with contents? "

" It could be demolished quite easily and re-erected any place. Like the Americans did with Number 10, Downing Street, and Marylebone Station."

He unhitched his cloth-of-gold apron, folded it into a neat flat rectangle and placed it carefully in the specially designed pocket that had been sewn onto the zipper-suit and extended down the front of the thigh almost to the knee.

" Let's go."

" Of course, it's very old," I told him as we shot to street level. " But the bricks were preserved by something called stucco . . ."

All the way to Hammersmith in the male monocapsule, he was staring ahead with a collector's gleam and questioning me about the house. Naturally, in order to encourage contemplation, the car had no windows, but he took little advantage of that. Still, he was a Controller, and I did my best to be polite.

The only time he left the subject of the house was after we had reached Hammersmith. We were crossing the street when we saw a woman, absolutely unveiled, looking through a chink in the curtains of an apartment. But after he had found a policeman and seen the woman arrested, he returned to the topic of the house with increased zest.

I was careful to avoid being over-eager in my replies, to give him the impression that I could sell the house anywhere, any time. That was true, although it was not true that I owned it. At least, not all of it. Amalgamated Relics had bought it. It was a commission job.

It had cost a lot of credits. There were only five other such houses in Britain—reminders of the time when millions used to live in separate houses with no fodder-meters laid on and only the most individual means of cooking and cleaning. Those people must have had no time at all for contemplation; and that was the reason, of course, for the astonishing sensuality of the age. I needn't tell you how women used to arrange their hair and clothing deliberately, paint their faces, and so on.

The house stood on a neat grass plot between two apartment blocks, and its appearance evoked sounds of delight from the Controller. I opened the front door with my key. This door led into a queer, box-like space, the original use of which is baffling even to those of us who have studied social history, the space called by the pre-plast builders the " hall."

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He went into ecstasies about the artefacts my principals had hung on the walls: an Elizabeth II dustpan and brush, a George the Fifth kitchen-boiler lid-lifter, a kind of bag made of the pre-rayon stuff called "flannel," which antiquarians had identified as the covering for one of those long-perished "hot-water bottles" made of the sap of the rubber tree.

I took him three steps into the kitchen. "You can see the original gas- and water-pipes," I told him. "I had them stripped out of the wall. Some vandal had kept them cased in."

"Aren't people dreadful?" he said.

"And here's the sink, just as it was. Such a lovely old, mellow, stained sink! The taps, too—twentieth-century chrome. Do look underneath. See? A real old brass union. That's where the pipes used to come up. Somewhere, of course, there's the site of the old boiler. My theory is it used to be in the alcove by the back door. You never can be sure."

But the Controller was gazing upwards.

"That?" I said. "Yes, right in the middle of the ceiling. The electric fitting, just as it was. Afraid the wiring's gone—some previous owner must have grubbed it out and sold it. But the light fitting and the ceiling rose are interesting. And there's a 'larder.' Know what that is?"

"A place," he answered confidently, "where they used to keep uncooked food." I flung open the door.

"The shelving was removed by some tasteless person in the remote past. But did you know that nine-tenths of the people who lived in these houses had no refrigeration?"

"They died in thousands."

"In tens of thousands," I said. "It was only the constant preoccupation with procreation that saved the species."

I showed him the rest of the house. The plumbing had long been stripped from that queer orgiastic closet called the "bathroom," but three old tiles on the wall were perfectly genuine.

"Wonderful!" he said. "By the way, how much do you want for this house?"

"A hundred thousand," I said.

He was still whistling with amazement when we reached the loft by crawling through a square in the ceiling of the landing. It was dark up there, but I had a pocket sol and I held the orb up by its handle and the place was illuminated, all its ancient pitch-pine and the undersides of the old, old roofing tiles.

The Controller stood reverently and took one or two deep breaths. And then he saw the cold-water tank and the breath caught in his throat. "Wonderful!"

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" I'm glad you like it." The tank was pretty fabulous, as a matter of fact. " Galvanized," I added. " A way they had of treating iron against rust."

" Great craftsmen," he said, " for all their excruciating morals."

He approached the tank, hopping from joist to joist, for the loft was unboarded. He stroked the thing with his gloating hand, as greedy as a child at monthly playtime. " How can it be dismantled? It's too big to go through the trapdoor."

" The best way is to remove the roof and lift it out."

I peered inside. There was some rust in there and the serried swellings made by the fixers they called " rivets; " and then I squinted through the inch space underneath the tank where it rested on two joists with boarding between. I blew the dust from a joist, and taking off my new blue halo-cap balanced it gently on the venerable surface of the wood.

There was a lot of dirt under the tank—dirt and something else. I groped with my index finger. My finger came away grey with dust but had failed to touch the object.

" There's something underneath," I said. " A flat thing."

As soon as I had spoken I could have bitten off my tongue. I needn't have said anything about it, in which case any deal with the Controller for house and contents would have left me with the flat thing, whatever it was, and my principals would have been none the wiser. And it might be a really choice piece, such as an enamel plate or baking-tin.

But I had wagged my tongue, and now Kronig was fussing around and producing a folding foot-rule from the pocket that contained his apron and peering through the slit himself, sweating and beaming. The foot-rule struck the thing and it slithered out with a lot of fluff. Kronig grabbed it triumphantly and blew and wiped it with his sleeve. We both stared at it for several distinctively timeless seconds . . .

Let me explain what a " calendar " was. We now have the Dassian Year of one thousand, four hundred, and sixty-one days, corresponding with the duration of the master's famous trance after his visit to New Orleans in 1996. If we want to know the date we feel our beads. But the Pre-plastic society had a year of 365¼ days, and the only way they could tell the date was by looking at a printed formula called a " calendar." These formulae were often stuck to a picture-card and were meant to be hung on walls. There is one in the British Museum depicting a cornfield, with this legend underneath: *With Compliments, S. Snaith & Son, Practical Chimney-Sweeps.*

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The thing Kronig held was a "calendar" consisting of the picture of a woman.

It has long been recognized that the greatest single factor deflecting the soul from contemplation of the infinite has been the physical configuration of woman. Furthermore, it is a scientific fact that the representation of the scantily adorned female shape is even more inimical to holiness than a complete absence of clothes.

I can be frank here. The nudity of this woman was presented with a species of adornment that was designed, obviously and deliberately, to arouse concupiscence. She wore a kind of vest or sheath made of some shimmering material, leaving the arms bare and also the thighs. Her legs were in evidence for their whole length; the black stockings in which they were encased were suspended from the upper garment by two thin strips of the ancient material called "elastic." By some strange alchemy of a biological sort, these strips, which lay against the naked flesh, were excessively provocative, as was the fact that the vest or sheath had no decent folds or cloaklike properties but clung damply to her person, moulded to the swellings of the bust.

The shoulders, like the arms, were naked. As if to add unnecessary emphasis to the obvious revelations of the vest or sheath, the beginning of the depression dividing the mammae was in full view. To crown all this, there was an unveiled face and uncovered hair, and illuminating all, making all shockingly meaningful, was an attitude, a pose, that *invited* . . .

Underneath the photograph, with no explanation, no clue, was simply, M . . .

I tore my gaze from the insidious image and glanced at Kronig. His big, babylike face was sweating.

"Disgusting," I said, thinking: *It's worth ten thousand credits.*

"Quite an unexpectedly crude discovery," he said, with the non-attached and (how did he do it?) disinterested manner of the professional moralist.

Silence. "But, of course," he added, turning his burdenless eyes full on mine without even batting an eyelid, "occasionally the antiquarian must have his decent instincts outraged by the accident of findings thing like this."

"Yes, oh yes!" I agreed.

It was deadlock. I did not know what to do. It was the law, naturally, to burn or pulverize any indecent antiquity on discovery—I need scarcely recall the great Trafalgar Square bonfire when a lost vault of the National Gallery was excavated fifty years ago. But this was different; it was an incident without

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witnesses, and I wanted one lead, just one wink or shrug or smirk, to put me on the right lines.

The tension was awful.

The Controller did not say anything else but just stood there, with his big face registering nothing; and at last I could stand it no longer, so I repeated: " Disgusting! "

He stirred as if I'd intruded on a reverie. " What? Oh yes . . ."

I was savage with him and with myself. Nothing else would have made me say the next words: " Let's burn it at once."

" Burn it? Yes, of course."

He turned, still holding it, and slowly, ponderously, began to lower himself from the hatch. I was almost weeping as I followed.

Outside, behind the house, grew a patch of grass.

" Here, I think."

I nodded; my limbs were dead-weighted.

" Got anything to start a fire with? " I had a twenty-first century " lighter," used probably for that habit they had of breathing the smoke of a burning plant. The device still worked.

" Any paper? " he added. " We may as well make a good blaze. We will consume this shamelessness utterly."

I had a copy of the *Daily Goodworker*. I handed it to him. He crunched the fifty sheets into a large, loose ball. He stood for a moment, paper in one hand, lighter in the other, the infernal picture tucked under his arm.

Then I remembered that I'd left my new blue cap in the loft. Suddenly the flimsy excuse occurred to me like inspiration. I said: " I've left my halo in the loft. Excuse me . . ."

When I came back with the halo Kronig was standing by a little heap of dusty ash. He stamped it into the grass. The grass smoked. " That's that," he said, swelling his chest.

" Fine."

" Well," he said, " about the house. It's a deal. How much did you say? A hundred thousand? "

" A hundred and ten," I said.

I noticed that he had put on his cloth-of-gold apron.

★ ★ ★

" Sell Them a Story "

Practical information invaluable to short-story writers is given in " Sell Them a Story," by Jean LeRoy (Constable 7s. 6d.). From her long experience in handling fiction, the author gives excellent advice on the technique of writing and marketing the short story. A handbook for all would-be writers.

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DOGS' DELIGHT

Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog

Psalm XXII

She even gave a Christmas party for Heliogabalus the Wonk, to which all the canine pets of their acquaintances were invited, a party memorable both for the dogs and their owners: at sight of the Christmas tree with bleeding chunks of meat and gorgeously beribboned bones affixed to the branches, all the quadrupeds, irrespective of pedigree, leapt, yapped and made an orgy of it. Fido! Bromo! Scruff! Scotty! Bibbles! Bijou!—they snarled, scrunched, gorged and quarrelled without restraint, deaf to the commands and entreaties of masters and mistresses; it was difficult to induce them to tear themselves away.

HAROLD ACTON, *Peonies and Ponies*

Cri de Cœur

Pray steal me not, I'm Mrs. Dingley's
Whose heart in this four-footed thing lies.

JONATHAN SWIFT, *On the Collar of Tiger, Mrs. Dingley's Lapdog*

Vanishing Trick

He was a full-grown St. Bernard when I first, most foolishly, introduced him to toys. I had bought a toy in the street for my own amusement. It represented a woman, a young mother, flinging her little son over her head with one hand and catching him in the other, and I was entertaining myself on the hearth-rug with this pretty domestic scene when I heard an unwonted sound from Porthos, and looking up, I saw that noble and melancholic countenance on the broad grin. I shuddered and was for putting the toy away at once; but he sternly struck down my arm with his, and signed that I was to continue. The unmanly chuckle always came, I found, when the poor lady dropped her babe; but the whole thing entranced him; he tried to keep his excitement down by taking huge draughts of water; he forgot all his niceties of conduct; he sat in holy rapture with the toy between his paws, he took it to bed with him, ate it in the night, and searched for it so longingly next day that I had to go out and buy him the man with the scythe. After that we had everything of note,

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the bootblack boy, the toper with the bottle, the woolly rabbit that squeaks when you hold it in your mouth; they all vanished as inexplicably as the lady; but I dared not tell him my suspicions, for he suspected also, and his gentle heart would have mourned had I confirmed his fears.

J. M. BARRIE, 1860–1937,
The Little White Bird

Licensed

The City Dog goes to the drinking trough,
He waves his tail and laughs, and goes when
he has had enough.
His intelligence is on the brink
Of human intelligence. He knows the Council
will give him a drink.

The Wild Dog is not such an animal,
Untouched by human kind, he is inimical,
He keeps his tail stiff, his eyes blink;
And he goes to the river when he wants a drink.
He goes to the river, he stamps on the mud,
And at night he sleeps in the dark wood.

STEVIE SMITH, *The Wild Dog*

Working Dog

Robert said to Linda: "Did you work on any special plan when you were arranging the cabins, or how did you do it?"

"Why? Wasn't it all right?"

"Perfect. Everybody had a place, and made for it. But I just wondered what you went by when you allocated the good cabins, that's all."

"Well, I simply," said Linda, "gave the best cabins to the people who had *Labrador* on their card, because I used to have one when I was little and he was such a terrific . . . so sweet, you know."

"Ah," said Robert, gravely, "all is now explained. *Labrador* in Spanish happens to mean labourer. So you see under your scheme (excellent by the way, most democratic) the farm hands all found themselves in luxury while the intellectuals were battened. That'll teach them not to be so clever. You did very well, Linda, we were all most grateful."

"He was such a sweet Labrador," said Linda dreamily, "I wish you could have seen him. I do miss not having pets."

NANCY MITFORD, *The Pursuit of Love*

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Doggone!

Philos of his dogge doth brágge
For having many feates;
The while the curre undoes his bagge,
And all his dinner eates.

WILLIAM BROWNE, *The Shepheard's Pipe*

Strip-Tease

Presently she saw a singular dog. Other people also saw it. It was the colour of chocolate; it had a head and shoulders richly covered with hair that hung down in thousands of tufts like the tufts of a modern mop such as is bought in shops. This hair stopped suddenly rather less than halfway along the length of the dog's body, the remainder of which was naked and as smooth as marble. The effect was such as to give to the inhabitants of the Five Towns the impression that the dog had forgotten an essential part of its attire and was outraging decency. The ball of hair which had been allowed to grow on the dog's tail, and the circles of hair which ornamented its ankles, only served to intensify the impression of indecency. A pink ribbon round its neck completed the outrage. The animal had absolutely the air of a decked trollop.

ARNOLD BENNETT, *The Old Wives' Tale*

Tailpiece

You are gentle, yet you bark
At a footstep in the dark;
You are wilful, wanton, wild,
As the April-hearted child,
And like his, your naughtiness
Doubles your deliciousness.
True, you are so tiny that
Dogs mistake you for a cat,
Yet what worth could bigness give
To a just diminutive?
Long-haired, larger dogs may be
Full of grace and gaiety,
But could such aspire to share
The distinction of your air,
Or be, with servile tail complete,
Half so compact or half so sweet?

ARTHUR SYMONS, *For Api*

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UNDER SUSPICION

The mews looked so sane, so innocent, so solidly London

by EDWARD LINDALE

CAMERON'S eyes slid expertly over the sheets of typescript. He didn't touch them, but stood leaning over the desk, hands clasped behind his back and his face in the shadow above the parchment lamp. His tall, rather thin body was tense, yet perfectly balanced. His right hand tried the desk drawer. It was unlocked. He glanced swiftly at the doorway leading to the flat's small kitchen and began to slide the drawer open . . .

"With or without?" The girl's voice rose, clear and untroubled, above the slight clatter of cups in the kitchen.

"With, thanks," Cameron said.

He moved smoothly in front of the drawer and pushed it shut with his left hand, his body shielding it from view. He turned away.

"You'll have to take it without," Lindsay Irving said, appearing in the doorway. "There's not enough milk."

Cameron grinned. "Thought I had a choice."

"So you had," she smiled. "But you made the wrong one."

She carried the supper tray across the room and placed it on a small table. She was tall, nearly as tall as Cameron, with a straight, heel-and-toe grace of movement. Her hair was almost black and her face, in profile as Cameron saw it now, had a wistfulness that he knew would be completely dispelled when she looked up. Then she did, and there was nothing wistful about her eyes; they were large and dark, reflecting the same humour that lay quietly about her lips.

Looking at her, Cameron again felt a twinge of shame about what he was doing. He had felt it many times in the past fortnight, and each time it became a little sharper. Soon, he thought, it would become unbearable and he didn't know what he could do about it then.

"It's better black, anyway," he said.

"The perfect guest," she smiled. Her voice was pitched low, softly modulated, but the slight sharpness of an American accent gave it the same quality of humour that lived in her eyes and about her mouth.

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Cameron sat down carefully, balancing the coffee-cup. He inclined his head, slightly, towards the desk.

"What are you working on now?"

"Nothing exciting."

"Just writing, in itself, must be exciting."

"No," she said. "In itself, it's hard work. Finishing a story and getting it published, that can be exciting. And then only sometimes."

On the radio, an impeccable BBC announcer began reading the news. England was going down to Australia in the Test match at Lord's. She reached for the switch. "You don't want to hear any more of this?"

Cameron shook his head, and she let the announcer's voice die in the air.

"I can't believe you," Cameron said. He recognized, with distaste, the professional glibness with which he was guiding the conversation, and he had to strengthen his workaday hard shell of toughness to persevere. "That bomb story of yours," he said, "writing *that* must have been exciting."

"Exciting!" she exclaimed. "It worried me crazy."

Cameron put down his cup. "Why?"

"What do I know about atom bombs?" she said. "And it's not like ordinary things, where you can have a little chat with someone and get your background facts."

"That's so," Cameron nodded. "But if you found the right man—"

"That's every girl's worry," she laughed. "With atomic scientists, it's impossible."

"No," Cameron said. "It is not impossible. Merely more difficult."

A slight frown touched her forehead. "Sometimes I wish I'd never written that story . . ."

"It was good."

"Too good." She leaned forward and took a small iced cake from the tray. "There are so many implications it's rather frightening."

"I don't see why," Cameron said, slowly. "The atom bomb's only another weapon. You might as well be frightened about a rifle, or the first bow and arrow."

"You're being kind," she said, and lifted her head to look into his eyes. "But you know it's more than that. There's so much idealism involved—spying, mystery . . ."

"Idealism?"

She nodded, gravely. "According to the point of view."

"I suppose you're right." There was a troubled look in

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Cameron's grey eyes. His mouth was tight and the vertical lines that ran past the corners were more deeply etched.

"Don't take it to heart." She leaned forward and touched his sleeve. Her eyes mocked him, kindly. "Even a woman must be right sometimes."

Cameron grinned then, briefly, and his lean face lost all its hardness. "Sometimes," he said.

He felt a disproportionate relief as though the humour, slight as it was, acted as a reagent to the acid eating into him the more he led her into talking about her story.

"You're a strange man," she said, watching him with steady eyes, her chin cupped in her hands. "I thought Englishmen were supposed to be phlegmatic."

Cameron stirred uncomfortably. "Like all generalizations," he said, "it's quite inaccurate."

"It certainly is for you," she said. "Sometimes you seem quite—perhaps it isn't the right word—quite hard. And then, the next second, you're sympathetic, kind—" She paused—"There's something inside you, driving you on."

"What?"

She lifted one hand in a slight gesture. "I don't know. Something intangible . . ."

"An intuition?"

"Men always say that," she said. "No. I don't think I believe in intuition."

"There must be something in it," Cameron said. He leaned forward slightly in his chair. Then he sat back slowly, as if suddenly conscious of his tenseness and wanting to give an impression of nonchalance.

"How else could you have written that story?"

"You write stories with hard work, not intuition."

Cameron took out his cigarettes and offered her one.

"The ending must have been intuition, surely?"

She took his light and watched the cigarette-smoke drifting towards the low, raftered ceiling of the flat. "Anything but the ending," she said. "Endings are the hardest work of all."

"Then it wasn't intuition?"

"Of course not."

Cameron hesitated for a fraction of a second. His mouth tightened almost imperceptibly, as though he were frightened of what he was about to ask. "Was it knowledge, then?"

"Knowledge of the craft of writing, yes." She picked up the shining metal percolator. "More coffee?"

"Thanks."

Cameron lifted his cup, his mind churning in a strange agony

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of doubt. Doubt because she had closed the conversation so unmistakably—from boredom or fear? The agony strange because his was not a mind that easily admitted worry, and because he couldn't pinpoint the cause. It was something to do with Lindsay Irving, he knew. Something in the way she walked, or spoke, or smiled, the way the colour moved in her cheeks, the way her lips curved and her eyes changed with her moods.

Until he had met her two weeks ago, he had thought his mind was hard and disciplined, but now he wasn't sure any longer. It had been hard, brilliantly hard, when he had sat in front of Avery's desk and planned how he would meet her. Avery, as always, had just the right person, one of those confirmed party-goers who specialized in introductions. And that is how it had happened, at a crowded party in a Bloomsbury flat—one of those literary bun-fights for which the district is renowned. A murmur of names, a smile, an inclination of the head, the quick, easy small talk of a party vortex—dragging up the names of a few American writers whose work you knew: Hemingway, Dos Passos, O'Neill. So simple, so ridiculously simple . . .

"You're worried about something," Lindsay Irving said, gently.

Cameron looked up, drawing a curtain of unconcern down over his face. "I'm a little tired."

"You act as though you're worried."

"It must be an act," he said, stretching his lips into an actor's grin. "I'm not the worrying kind."

"In my experience," she said, "anyone can be the worrying kind."

"Then I'll tell you," Cameron said. He floated a fat smoke-ring up to the ceiling, and hoped he wasn't overdoing the nonchalance. It was difficult to play a part with a girl like Lindsay Irving, more difficult than anything he had ever done before. "I can't get that story of yours out of my mind," he said. "Something about it fascinates me."

"I'm flattered."

"The thing I can't understand," he said, "is why you exploded the bomb in a ship."

"Why not?" She regarded him patiently. "It had to explode somewhere, to finish the story."

"But *in a ship*," he said, forcing his voice into a tone of incredulity. "The story was published two months before the British Monte Bello test. And that was the first time an atom bomb had been exploded in a ship."

"Perhaps they read my story and copied the idea," she suggested mockingly. "D'you think I could sue them?"

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Cameron stood up abruptly and crossed to the window to hide the sudden annoyance caused by her flippancy. The curtains were open and he peered down into the mews two floors below, its cobble-stones gleaming under the lamplight, and its odd corners pooled in shadow. It looked so sane, so innocent, so solidly London, that he felt again that this thing he was probing was unthinkable. Only, as Avery had said in his dry, pedantic manner, espionage was never unthinkable.

He turned back into the room, looking at his wrist-watch. " No wonder I'm tired," he said. " It's nearly one."

Lindsay Irving stood up, with a swift, lithe movement. " It's been a lovely evening," she smiled, her dark eyes wide and bright. " Thank you."

He responded instantly, by instinct or in relief, and his mouth relaxed in a smile, too.

It touched his eyes, softening them and giving his face a strangely youthful look. " That's a nice thing to say."

" It was a nice thing to do," she said. " Taking me to a good play." She hesitated slightly, and her smile deepened. " And then being so interested in my work."

Cameron noticed the hesitation and couldn't decide whether it was modesty or polite disbelief. Did she suspect his interest? He kept the smile on his lips with an effort, but he couldn't do anything with his eyes. Hardness touched them and his face was serious with it. He saw the change in her expression as she looked at him, and he cursed inwardly at his inability to act a part with her. Something had gone wrong, from the first time he had met her, something that blunted the sharp edge of his purpose . . . something that he didn't care to examine too closely, because he was afraid of what he would find.

" I'll see you to the door," she said, quietly.

He followed her down the spiral stairs that led into the garage. There was just room to walk between the wall and the little car squatting snugly next to the stairs. She stood with her hand on the catch of the wicket-gate in the big garage doors, and as Cameron moved forward to go out he brushed close against her in the semi-darkness, smelling the slight fragrance of her hair, seeing the dark, questioning look in her eyes, the gleam of white teeth between parted lips . . . so close to his, so close.

Then she was in his arms and he held her tightly, rubbing his face against her hair, his eyes closed and all the worry and suspicion and wretchedness fallen away. He kissed her, deliberately and deeply, knowing as he did so that this was the thing that had made him afraid. The thing that had made him ashamed of his work for the first time in his life . . .

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" John," she whispered. " Darling." Then she pushed him with gentle firmness towards the little door. " Good night."

He stepped out into the lamplit mews, with its bright, magic cobble-stones and soft shadows. " Good night," he said, softly. He touched her face with a hand, trailing his fingertips down the soft curve of her cheek. " Good night."

Then he turned and matched his steps to the hollow echoes, turned right and came out on the Outer Circle, with Regent's Park mysterious and beautiful under the moon. He caught a cab at Marylebone Road and sat hunched in its corner, bewildered, lost, his mind turning in endless convolutions until the memory of Avery stabbed coldly into his thoughts. What was he going to say to Avery now? What *could* you say to a man like that? A cold, immovable Buddha of efficiency who wanted facts, detailed reports, astringent words . . . And all he had to offer was an emotion.

Inspector Avery sat stiffly behind his desk. The sign on the frosted-glass door in front of him said: *Special Branch—No Admittance.* He was a lean, dried-up man, with thin lips and hard blue eyes in a lined face. He smiled rarely and only at things that few others thought funny. His brain was keen and polished to the brightness of steel.

He smiled faintly now as he looked at Cameron. " You think there is nothing subversive about the woman Irving? "

Cameron frowned slightly at the official terminology. " I think it was merely coincidence."

" Coincidence is not a frequent thing," Avery observed, dryly.

Cameron nodded. " But it does happen."

" Yes," Avery said. " Its existence is not disputed—only its timing." He sat back in his chair, swivelling slightly from side to side, his fingertips pressed together and touching his mouth, eyes pinpointed and shrewd. " Let us run through the known facts, Cameron." He put his hands on the desk's edge.

" The woman Irving has a short story published about the disappearance of a scientist at the Monte Bello atom-bomb test. Well thought out. Topical. Perhaps anyone could have written such a story. It is quite ordinary in many respects. A simple enough love story with a new, modern background—"

" I don't agree," Cameron interrupted, before he could stop himself. " It wasn't ordinary. It was finely written."

Avery looked at him coldly. " We are not discussing the literary merits of the work, Cameron." He drummed his fingers on the desk for a moment. " The thing that interests us is that she placed her atom-bomb explosion *inside a ship.*"

" Coincidence," Cameron said.

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" Maybe," Avery murmured. " But it was strange she chose such a method. She is an American. She had all the published details of the American atomic explosions to draw on. And none of them were inside ships. The bombs were dropped from planes or exploded under water, buried in the ground or placed on steel towers—even fired from artillery. But the Irving woman chose, by sheer coincidence, of course, the exact method the British scientists had decided on. And that two months before the bomb was exploded."

" Surely you don't imagine she's a spy? " Cameron protested. " She would hardly publish her facts."

" Quite so," Avery agreed, smoothly. " I don't think she is *necessarily* a spy. But I think there's every possibility she may be in contact with important sources of information."

Cameron thought of Lindsay Irving as he had left her last night, her soft mouth under his, her arms round him. And then, as he went away, her face sweetly serious in the half-light of the mews. " I don't think so," he said harshly. More harshly than he had intended.

" It is a question of careful checking, rather than thinking," Avery said, acidly. " You've seen our file containing the names of writers suspected of subversive activities. Check them one by one. See if any of them are known to the woman Irving. She may have heard something from one of them—a chance word dropped in argument, a drunken confidence . . ."

Cameron thought, " If he calls her ' the woman Irving ' again, I shall lose my temper." Aloud, he said, " I've checked. She's friendly with none of them."

" Why is she living here? " Avery shot the question aggressively. " What's wrong with America? "

" Nothing," Cameron said, blandly. " Nothing at all. She just likes it here."

" Look here, Cameron," Avery said, leaning across his desk. " You're one of my best men. I trust you. I'd hate to see you go off the rails."

Cameron looked at him coldly. " I don't know what you mean."

" I think you do," Avery said, quietly. He stared at his desk blotter for a long moment, then pushed it gently with one finger. " I am told she is very pretty, Cameron."

" That is so," Cameron said, slowly and deliberately. " The woman Irving is very pretty."

A slight flush stained Avery's leathery skin and his thin lips compressed themselves a fraction more. They looked like a pencil-line. " That will be all, Cameron," he said. " Let me have your report tomorrow."

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It was one of those summer days that London experiences every few years. A pinnacle of a day. On such a day all the separate perfections that anyone ever wishes for come together and present themselves in sunlight and cool-fingered breeze, in the slight, happy drowsiness of a pastorale. The breeze meandered across the lake in Regent's Park, not so strong as to make ripples, just shifting the surface enough to create a subtle, changing pattern of light. Enough to rub together the leaves of trees and make them whisper, enough to dissipate the noise of traffic on the Outer Circle and tone it down to a hum that might have been the drone of bees in a country meadow.

" I suppose I should be angry," Lindsay Irving said, in a flat, empty way. " Insulted. Outraged. I suppose I should be all of those."

" But you're not? " Cameron's eyes betrayed the anxiety that he managed to keep from his voice.

" No," she said. " Just hurt and numb."

Cameron picked up a twig from the lawns where they sat under the trees at the lake's edge, tossed it into the water and watched it bob idly against the bank. His face was drawn with unhappiness.

" You shouldn't be hurt," he said, gently. " I've told you everything. How it started and how it will finish. I've told you about Avery. I've told you enough to have myself thrown out of the service. Perhaps prosecuted. Surely that means something? "

" Yes," she said. " But not enough to help me."

" What can I do, then? "

" Nothing."

Cameron moved to touch her, but she shifted slightly and he wasn't sure whether she had evaded him purposely or not.

" There must be something," he said. " You know how I feel about it. How I feel about you."

" I know what you've told me," she said. " But you don't understand."

" Try me," Cameron said, gently.

She looked out across the lake to the far bank where the dignified bulk of Bedford College lay immobile behind its trees, where the lakeside gardens flared with colour, where long lines of deck-chairs curved round the water's edge in a Dufy pattern . . .But she saw none of these.

" Perhaps I'm shocked more than anything," she said slowly, thinking about the words, contemplating them as though someone else were saying them for her. " Perhaps more shocked than hurt. It's hard to know."

" Look," Cameron said, patiently. " This started as a routine job. A routine check. I've done it a hundred times. And this

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was just another—until I met you. From the first time I saw you—the first time I spoke to you—it wasn't routine any more."

"But you persisted." She turned her head and her dark eyes rested on his face with the blank curiosity of a stranger.

"I knew you couldn't have done anything wrong."

"You read my manuscripts," she said. "Checked my bookshelves, my magazines . . . probed my thoughts . . . drew me out . . . led me to talk about politics, about my friends, about America . . . about war and peace, the kind of life I envisaged . . ."

"And hated myself for doing so."

"So interested in my writing," she went on inexorably. "How did I work out the ending of my short story? What made me think of it? How ingenious it was!" She gave a short, bitter laugh. "At first I thought you were being polite. Then I was flattered. I thought you were sincere."

"That was before I knew that I loved you."

She looked away quickly, but not before Cameron had seen the sharp pain in her eyes, the rose flush that suffused her face. He felt a thrill of hope run through him, a fierce, latent happiness.

"Look at it this way," he said, holding his excitement on a tight rein. "We have to check everything these days. You know that. There's too much at stake for personal feelings."

She nodded. "I know, but—"

"You'd hit on an atomic secret," he cut in. "No one thought you necessarily a spy because of that. Not even Avery—and he suspects his own mother most of the time. We just had to check. We do it every day, every night. You might have heard something. A chance word at a party, a hint, some snippet to lead us to a leak that had to be plugged. We had to make sure."

"And you have?"

"As sure as anyone can be."

"Not guilty for lack of evidence?"

"I wouldn't put it that way."

"No?"

"You're trying to simplify a complex thing," Cameron said quietly. "It can't be done."

He took out his cigarettes. She refused and he lit his own, drawing on it heavily, watching the paper curl back from the burning end as though it could help him to formulate the thoughts that he wanted to convey. "You may have heard it somewhere," he said, at last. "You can't swear that you didn't. Just as you might write a phrase that you've read long ago and stored in your subconscious. You think it's original, but someone calls it plagiarism. You are astounded when they show it to you on a printed page. That's what I mean by 'sure as anyone can be.'"

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" All right," she said. " I accept that." She made a little, helpless gesture with one hand. " But I thought you were genuine. That's what hurts. You acted so well . . ."

" I wasn't acting," Cameron said. He leaned forward, turning to look into her face. " Can't you see I wasn't acting? "

" It's so hard to see anything when you're hurt badly," she murmured, looking away. " It's like trying to simplify a complex thing. And you say that can't be done."

" Maybe I was wrong," Cameron said. " There is a way."

He stood up and looked down at her, his mind hard with decision. There was no point in further talk, because talk could never prove anything. Only action could do that. A clean, sharply-defined action that would cut out this doubt, this nagging misery, with the finality of a surgeon's knife.

" I'll walk you home."

" It doesn't matter," she said, bitterly. " It's a bright, sunny day."

So he let her go off alone along the winding path through the trees that skirted the lake, and watched her cross the little road that led to the Inner Circle and Queen Mary's Garden. She walked slowly, with her shoulders back and her head up, and the sun made lights in her hair as it struck through the trees. She was the Statue of Liberty and the Stars and Stripes. But Cameron had seen the gnawing misery in her eyes and it twisted inside him like some slow, agonizing poison.

He watched her out of sight, fiercely glad at the decision he had reached, knowing that it was the only way to make her believe in him again. Really believe.

Avery always looked as though he had never moved from his desk. You never thought of him as leaving it to eat or sleep, or to go on holiday. His colouring blended with the brown leather upholstery of the big, padded chair. He reminded Cameron of one of those camouflaging lizards that lie motionless for hours waiting for an insect to come within reach, and then obliterate it with the speed-blurred flick of a tongue.

" You seem very sure," Avery said now, tapping Cameron's report with the back of a hand. His eyes were still and watchful.

" It's what I'm paid for," Cameron said, coolly.

" No," Avery said. There was a touch of asperity in his voice. " You're paid to be right."

Cameron coloured slightly. " One can't produce legal proof in things like this."

" Exactly," Avery agreed.

" You mean the case will remain open? "

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Avery didn't answer at once, and Cameron knew his brain was working quickly behind those impassive eyes.

"Perhaps," he admitted. "We shall probably put it on file. Not proven." He lifted the report a few inches, then let it fall back on the desk. "I shall have to think about it."

"Here's something else, then," Cameron said, flatly. He pushed a short, typewritten note across the wide desk. "This can go on file, too."

Avery's eyes flicked over it, his face unmoved. "Why?"

"Because a resignation is something concrete," Cameron said. "Something that will make her believe in me . . . even if you don't."

Avery's thin lips twitched faintly. It was the nearest he ever came to a smile. "I didn't realize she was so important."

"Nothing and no one else is important," Cameron said.

"You're going to marry?"

Cameron didn't answer. What could he say to a question like that, when he writhed in a torture of doubt to know the answer himself?

"Come, now," Avery said, quietly. "We've worked together a long time."

"And yet you don't trust my judgment?"

"But I do," Avery said. "I thought perhaps it was a mild attraction. Now it is different." He took a red pencil from a small tray at the top of his blotting-pad and wrote *Case Closed* across the cover of Cameron's report. "Will that convince you?"

"Does it rub out?" Cameron asked, pointedly.

"Yes," Avery said. "But it won't."

Cameron breathed deeply. "Thank you."

"And the resignation?"

"It still stands."

"But surely, now I have accepted your report . . ."

"That was *your* proof," Cameron said. "The resignation is hers."

Avery sighed, a little too obviously. He opened a drawer and dropped in the resignation. "I'll hold it a while. Just in case."

"Well, good-bye," Cameron said, standing up. He offered his hand across the desk and Avery stood to take it.

"Good-bye," he said. "I've never told you; but I've always regarded you as my best man."

"Thanks," Cameron said. "I might ask you for a reference later. When I'm job-hunting."

He left the office and went into the big outside room which he shared with two other men. It was empty. He forced himself to walk quietly to his desk, to lift the black, squat telephone, and

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dial the number. Lindsay Irving's number. He watched the dial spin and uncurl beneath his finger, heard its slurring noise, and suddenly he was nervous—absurdly nervous, he kept telling himself. And yet he knew it wasn't absurd.

It wasn't absurd to fear that you had lost the most wonderful thing that had ever happened in your life. Any fear but that could be absurd. Fear of death was absurd; but not the fear of having to live when all the savour had gone from life . . .

Then Lindsay Irving's voice was in his ears, and he was pouring out all that was in his head and in his heart. He told her about his fears and about Avery, about his report and about his resignation. And as he talked the nervousness and fear left him, and when he had finished, he wasn't at all afraid of the long silence on the end of the line.

Then Lindsay Irving said, " But you mustn't do that."

The fear came back again, furtive now, wriggling in the corners of his mind. He hadn't imagined that she would reject the proof of his sincerity—the resignation that had cost so much to write.

" Why not? " he said, at last, stiffly.

" It's such important work," she said. " To all of us."

" I know," Cameron answered. " I thought I'd explained."

" Beautifully," she said, calmly. " You explained beautifully. But there is another way."

" Tell me," Cameron said. He hunched, tensely, on his chair.

" It isn't exciting," she said. " Doesn't need any initiative." She paused a moment. " You could've just waited for me to see your point of view."

Cameron's hand tightened on the telephone. The knuckles were very white against the black. " I couldn't wait that long."

" I know," she said, very softly. " Neither could I. So I took a short cut."

Cameron's chair bounced twice when it hit the floor and he didn't wait to pick it up.

In his quiet room Avery put down the telephone, reached under his desk, and switched off the interception set. He smiled quietly and nodded his head like a man well pleased with himself, for there was no need to worry about the woman Irving any more. He had a man on permanent assignment now.

He reached into his drawer and began methodically to tear up a small, typewritten note.

★ ★ ★

The Englishman has all the qualities of a poker except its occasional warmth.

DANIEL O'CONNELL

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★ *Each time Fauna, proprietress of the Bear Flag, marries off one of her girls she puts up a gold star. In this last extract from John Steinbeck's new novel, Fauna's plans for the happiness of Doc and her protégée Suzy reach a crescendo, to the accompaniment of sounds of high revel in Cannery Row, where Mack, Whitey No. 2, Hazel, and the rest of the boys stage a masquerade in the Palace Flophouse. Mack is determined to manoeuvre into Doc's safe-keeping the doubtful ownership of the Palace Flophouse (where, in Lee Chong's day and ever since, the boys have lived rent free.) To achieve this, Mack raffles the Flophouse, rigging the raffle in Doc's favour; with the proceeds, he intends to buy for Doc the microscope he needs to complete his cherished thesis.*

SWEET THURSDAY

by JOHN STEINBECK

THE communications system on Cannery Row is mysterious to the point of magic and rapid to the speed of light. At 9.11½, Fauna and Mack came to the decision that there should be a masquerade on Friday evening. By 9.12 the magic had started, and by 9.30 everyone who was not asleep, drunk, or away, knew about it. Consider what was in store for the ticket-holders: a party at the Palace Flophouse; a raffle that amounted to a sweepstake; an engagement of exciting proportions unknown in the annals of the Row; and, on top of this, a fancy-dress party! Any one of these would have been enough. Together they threatened to be a celebration close to a catastrophe.

Fauna breathed a sigh of relief for it solved her greatest problem. She wanted to dress Suzy in a certain way, and Suzy, being the tough monkey she was, would have resisted. Now it was easy. There's little difference between the wardrobe of Snow White and that of a lovely young bride.

There will be those who will consider that Fauna took too much upon herself in engineering a marriage without the knowledge or collusion of either party, and such sceptics will be perfectly right. But it was Fauna's conviction, born of long experience, that most people, one, did not know what they wanted; two, did not know how to go about getting it; and three, didn't know when they had it. Fauna was one of those rare

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people who not only had convictions but was quite willing to take responsibility for them. She knew that Doc and Suzy should be together. And since they were too confused, or thoughtless, or shy to bring about that happy state, Fauna was prepared to do it for them.

And if it was suggested that people should have the right to choose for themselves, after thinking it over she would have replied, "Who thinks? I can think because I ain't part of it." And if she had been accused of being a busybody she would have said, "Damn right! Been it all my life!"

You couldn't win an argument with Fauna because she would agree with you and then go right on as she had planned. She had taken up astrology because she had found that people who won't take advice from a wise and informed friend will blindly follow the orders of planets—which, by all reports, are fairly remote and aloof. Doc would refuse astrology, so he had to be sand-bagged. Fauna expected no thanks. She had given that up long ago. Doc could not interpret the black voice of his inner self, but it sounded loud in Fauna's ears. She recognized it by his loneliness. When she was with him, that low voice drowned out all the others.

On Saturday morning she made every girl at the Bear Flag bring out every article of clothing she possessed and lay it on the bed in her office.

The heap of finery on Fauna's bed was impressive. Some of those dresses could have got a girl booked for vagrancy just going out to mail a letter.

Now, Mabel was a natural-born, blowed-in-the-glass hustler. In any time, under any system, after a period of orientation, Mabel would have found herself doing exactly what she was doing in Cannery Row. This was not a matter of fate, but rather a combination of aptitudes and inclinations. Born in a hovel or a castle, Mabel would have gravitated towards hustling.

Mabel took Fauna aside and spoke to her privately. "My Grandma came from the old country," she said, when the door of her room was closed. Mabel opened the bottom drawer of her bureau and lifted out a brown-paper parcel sealed against air with strips of tape. "Grandma left it to Mama, and Mama left it to me," she said as she tore the paper. "We ain't none of us needed it."

She removed layer after layer of tissue paper and at last spread a dress out on her bed—a wedding-dress of sheerest white lawn embroidered with sprays of white flowers—stitches so tiny they seemed to grow out of the cloth. The bodice was close-fitting and the skirt very full. Mabel opened a box and laid beside the

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dress a silver wedding-crown. " I guess she wouldn't hurt it none," said Mabel. " Tell her not to spill nothing on it. I'll polish up the crown, it's kind of tarnished—real silver! "

Fauna was speechless for once. Her fingers went to the light and lovely fabric. She was a hard woman to break up, but the dress nearly did it. " Snow White!" she said breathlessly. " I better be careful or I'll get to believing my own story. Mabel! I'm going to give you my jet ear-rings."

" I don't want nothing."

" You want my jet ear-rings! "

" Aw, shoot! " said Mabel.

" Looks like it might nearly fit her," Fauna observed.

" Well, we can kind of tack it where it don't," said Mabel.

" You know, you're a good girl. You want I should go to work on you? "

" Hell, no! " said Mabel. " I like it here. There's a veil too in this here bag."

" I don't know if we can get away with a veil, but we'll try," said Fauna.

" Oh, she don't know a veil from a hole in the ground," said Mabel.

If only people would give the thought, the care, the judgment to international affairs, to politics, even to their jobs, that they lavish on what to wear to a masquerade, the world would run in greased grooves. On the surface Cannery Row was quieter than usual, but below the surface it seethed. In one corner of the Palace Flophouse, Whitey No. 2 gave careful lessons to little Johnny Carriaga in the art of palming cards. Johnny had been borrowed for the occasion—or, more truthfully, hired, since Alberto Carriaga had received sixty-two cents, the price of a gallon of wine, for the use of his first-born.

It was planned that Johnny should be dressed as Cupid, with paper wings, bow and arrow, and quiver. The quiver was added as a hiding-place for the winning raffle ticket. For although nearly everyone on the Row knew the raffle was rigged, a certain pride made it necessary to carry the deception off with dignity. Because of a small distrust of Johnny, the arrows in the quiver were tipped with rubber suction cups.

Whitey No. 2 had cut a card the exact size of a raffle ticket. " Now try it again, Johnny," he said. " No, I can see the edge of it. Look! Sort of squeeze the edges in your palm, like this. Now try it again. That's right! That's good. Now let's see you get it out of the quiver. You make a pass with the bow—like this—so they look at your other hand, and you say—"

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" I know," said Johnny. " ' I'm Cupid, God of Love, and I draw a bead on unsuspecting hearts.' "

" That's beautiful," said Eddie, one of the barmen at the Café La Ida. " I wonder where Mack got that? "

" He made it up," said Whitey No. 2. " Now, when you shove up the bow with your right hand, you get the ticket out of the quiver with your left. Try it."

" ' I-am-Cupid-God-of-Love,' " said Johnny, and he brandished the bow.

" That's good," said Whitey No. 2. " It will take a little more practice, though. Don't look at your left hand, Johnny. Look at the bow. Now, here's the bowl. Dig around in the cards without dropping the ticket. Go on, practise."

" I want thirty-five cents," said Johnny.

" What? "

" If I don't get thirty-five cents, I'll tell."

" Mack," said Whitey No. 2, " this here kid's jumped the price."

" Give it to him," said Mack.

" Seems like kids got no respect for their elders nowadays," Eddie observed. " If I ever said that, my old man would've clobbered me."

" Maybe your old man wasn't rigging no raffle," said Johnny.

Whitey No. 2 said, " This kid ain't honest. You know where bad kids go, Johnny? "

" I sure do, and I've been there," said Johnny.

" Give him the thirty-five cents," said Mack.

What hidden, hoarded longings there are in all of us! Behind the broken nose and baleful eye may be a gentle courtier. If one could be, for only an evening, whatever in the world one wished, what would it be? What secret would come out?

To a certain extent the theme of the Palace Flophouse raffle and engagement party was chosen because of Hazel. He was definitely dwarf material. But when he had reviewed the story, asked questions, and got as clear a picture as he ever got of anything, Hazel elected to be Prince Charming. He saw himself in white silk knee-breeches and an Eton jacket, his left hand fondling the hilt of a small sword.

They offered him Grumpy, lovable old Grumpy, the prize part of all, but Hazel stuck to his dream. It was Prince Charming or he wouldn't attend. Friendships have foundered on less.

" All right," said Mack, " you go ahead. I was going to help you with your costume, but I know when I'm stumped. Hazel, if you're Prince Charming, you're on your own."

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"Who cares?" said Hazel. "Who wants your help? I'll bet you're mad because you wanted to be Prince Charming."

"Not me," said Mack. "I'm going as a tree."

"How do you mean?"

"It's a forest, ain't it?" said Mack. "I want a little anenmity. You can't see the tree for the forest."

Hazel went to sit under the cypress tree. He was gloomy and he was frightened because ideas did not come to him, and when he sought them they ran screaming away. But he was determined. He could not let the office down. A man whom Fauna had sentenced by his horoscope to be President could not go as a dwarf. It wasn't dignified. Later in the morning he went to the back door of the Bear Flag and called for help from Joe Elegant, the cook.

Joe smiled. "I'll help you," he said maliciously.

All over Cannery Row, trunks were being opened, and the smell of mothballs penetrated as far as the middle of the street. And all over the Row, the story was being rewritten to fit the wardrobe. By unspoken agreement, no one planned to be Snow White.

In the Western Biological Laboratory, Doc awakened, racked with pain from sleeping on the floor. He lay still for a moment, trying to isolate the part of him that hurt worst. Not the least of his agony was his memory of forcing Old Jay, his wealthy and eccentric guest, to take his bed the night before. A crazy, alcoholic generosity, probably masochistic in origin, had prompted the sacrifice. He raised up on one shattered elbow and looked at the old devil sleeping so sweetly—his halo of yellow hair surrounding his polished pink pate, his breath puffing in small comfortable snores.

"Wake up!" Doc shouted in fury.

The pale eyes flickered. "What's for breakfast?" said Old Jay.

"Don't you even have the decency to have a hangover?"

"Certainly I do," said Old Jay with dignity. "How about some beer?"

"Does your head ache?"

"Yes."

"Do your joints ache?"

"Yes."

"Do you have low-blood-pressure depression?"

"Overwhelming."

"Then I've got you," said Doc. "You get the beer."

The pale eyes rolled despairingly. "I'll pay half if you get it."

"No."

"Tell you what I'll do—I'll loan you the money."

"No."

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Old Jay's eyes were bleak. "Reach me my trousers," he said, and he fished out a quarter and a dime and held them out.

"No," said Doc.

"What *do* you want?"

"I want two dollars."

"Why, that would be six bottles!"

"Exactly. You're trapped, Old Jay, and you know it."

Old Jay dug deep and found two one-dollar bills. "Maybe I can write it off to entertainment," he said.

It is customary at most masquerades for the arriving guests to be shy, ill at ease, and sober, and to stand around uneasily for maybe an hour before the party warms up. In this matter of starting a party, Cannery Row is far ahead of some other centres of culture. The party was to start at 9 p.m. sharp. The guests would be notified by the trumpet of Cacahuete Rivas, playing *Whistle while you Work.*

At least two hours before the signal, a series of small earnest parties, at Wide Ida's, the Bear Flag, and in private homes, were practising for the main event. This party was going to begin in full bloom. Of course, Mack and the boys were so weighed down with responsibility that they didn't get the best out of their liquor; still, they made progress, and they watched the big hand of the alarm clock on the back of the stove.

In the Bear Flag the pageantry was spread all over the floor. Snow White was going to have, as maids of honour, some of the best-known and most-respected hookers north of San Luis Obispo. The ladies were dressing in filmy gowns of red, yellow, and green, and each one was to carry a bottle of whisky garlanded with ribbons to match her dress. Fauna was going as a witch. It was her own idea. The only costume she really needed was a broom, but she had made a peaked black hat and a black alpaca wrap-around to carry the part off. But Fauna had a surprise in store. When the big moment came, she was prepared to fling off her black gown, switch broom for wand, and emerge as the fairy godmother.

Wide Ida's was dwarf country. Eight Happys, four Sneezys, six Dopeys, and nineteen Grumpys clustered about the bar, earnestly singing *Harvest Moon* in one-and-a-half-part harmony.

At the Western Biological Laboratory, Doc and Old Jay were hopelessly enmeshed in a discussion of tobacco mosaic. A dust-bin stood in the middle of the floor, and in it, nestled in crushed ice, the six remaining bottles of a case of champagne bought by Old Jay.

Doc and Old Jay had completely forgotten the party. When

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Cacahuete's trumpet sounded the call to arms, they were shouting so loud they didn't hear it. When the youth and beauty of Cannery Row walked gaily up the lantern-lit chicken-walk, Old Jay and Doc were still screaming at each other.

Suddenly Doc dropped his voice, and it had the effect of a loud noise. "I think I will go away," he said. "I have tried with every sinew and I have failed."

"Nonsense!" said Old Jay. "Young man, you are at the threshold of a great career."

"But what do I care for honours?"

"How do you know? You never got any," said Old Jay.

"Don't try to hold me back, Old Jay."

"I won't. There's too many of you already. Do you realize you haven't cooked any dinner?"

"I bought a pound of hamburger and you ate it raw before I got it near a pan."

"You shouldn't starve yourself, young friend," said Old Jay.

Eddie hurled himself up the steps and flung open the door. "Doc!" he cried. "For heaven's sake! She's started! They're going to draw!"

Doc picked a bottle from the ice. "Arm yourself, Old Jay. Forward!"

They had to help Old Jay up the chicken-walk.

The draw was being held up for them. Dwarfs, animals, monsters were drawn up in a half-circle, facing the curtain.

"I guess we're all here," said Mack. He looked behind the curtain. "You all right, Johnny?"

"Damn cold," said Johnny.

And at that moment Hazel entered proudly, his chin up, his eyes flashing with dignity. Joe Elegant had worked on Hazel all day. The basis of his costume was long grey underwear, to which were sewn hearts, diamonds, spades, and clubs, in red and black. Hazel's army shoes had yellow pompons on the toes. An Elizabethan ruff of stiff paper was around his neck, and on his head a Knight Templar's hat with a white ostrich plume. From the belt around his middle hung a long scabbard. His right hand proudly held a cavalry sabre at salute.

Joe Elegant had concentrated his spite in one area. The drop-seat of the costume had been removed, and in its place, right on the essential surface of Hazel himself, was painted a bull's-eye in concentric circles of red and blue.

Hazel was a breath-taking sight. He did not glance around. He knew he was right—he knew it by the silence. Smartly he turned the sabre to stand easy and crossed his hands on the hilt. His breath caught in his throat.

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" I," he said huskily, " I am Prince Charming." And the company could see now that his cheeks were rouged and his eyelashes beaded. " I proteck dam—damsels," he announced. And only then did he turn his proud head for the applause and approval he knew he merited.

There were tears in Mack's eyes. " You done fine, Hazel," he said. " Couldn't nobody do better. Who helped you? "

" Joe Elegant," said Hazel. " What a nice guy! "

Whitey No. 2 moved up at Mack's imperceptible signal. " You want I should go now? "

" Right now," said Mack softly. " Kick the stuffing out of him."

Hazel moved proudly in on their soft talk. " Mr. Joe Elegant presents his compliments," he said. " He is sorry he cannot attend as he had to leave town on business. Let's see—is that all?—Yep, that's all."

" We'll thank him when he comes back," said Mack grimly.

The guests looked at Hazel with stricken eyes, and no one laughed. One glance at Mack's jutting chin and doubled fists stopped that impulse.

" Get on with it," Wide Ida growled.

Mack pulled himself together, advanced to the curtain, and turned to face the guests.

" Fellow citizens," he said, " right here in Cannery Row lives a guy that there can't nobody want a better friend. For years we have took his bounty without sharing nothing back at him. Now this guy needs a certain article that runs into dough. Therefore it is the pleasure of I and the boys to raffle off the Palace Flophouse to buy a microscope for this guy—*for Doc.* We got three hundred and eighty bucks. Curtain! "

Doc shouted, " Mack! You're crazy! "

" Shut up! " said Mack. " Curtain! "

The cloth was pulled aside to reveal Johnny Carriaga. Johnny brandished his bow. " I-am-Cupid-God-of-Love! " he shouted. Then the winning ticket slipped from his palm and fluttered to the floor.

Johnny scrambled after it, yelling, " I-draw-a-bead-on-unexpected-hearts." He grabbed the ticket and turned to Mack. " What do I do now? " he asked.

Mack gave up. " Oh, what the hell! " Then he shouted, " Is that the ticket you have drawn, Cupid? "

" I have plucked from the many." Johnny hadn't been near the bowl but he yelled it anyway.

" Give it to me, you little brute," Mack said to him quietly. " Friends," he said, " do my eyes deceive me? This *is* a surprise!

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Well, well! Folks, it gives me great pleasure to announce that *the Palace Flophouse has passed into the hands of Doc.*"

Doc was jarred towards sobriety. He moved close to Mack. "You're crazy!" he said.

"Like a fox," said Mack.

"Who told you *you* owned it? I didn't tell."

"How do you mean, Doc?"

"I didn't think Chong told anybody but me. He was afraid you'd do something like this."

Mack said, "Let's step outside."

Under the lanterns they faced each other. Doc popped the champagne cork and handed the bottle to Mack, who cupped his mouth over the glistening foam.

"What was you saying, Doc?" he asked quietly.

"When Chong was going away for good, he wanted you and the boys to have a home. He made the title deeds over to you and put up the money for ten years' taxes."

"Well, whyn't he tell us?"

"He was afraid if you knew you owned it you'd mortgage it or sell it, and then you wouldn't have a home."

Mack was shaken. "Doc," he said, "would you do me a favour? Don't tell the boys."

"Why, sure."

"Shake on it?"

"Shake! Have a drink."

Suddenly Mack laughed. "Doc," he said, "I and the boys want to ask will you let the joint to us?"

"Sure I will, Mack."

"I hope they never find out. They'd skin me," said Mack.

"Wouldn't it be simpler if we just forgot the raffle?"

"No, sir!" said Mack. "Chong was right. I wouldn't trust the boys not to sell her some time when they need a buck. I wouldn't trust myself."

Old Jay's visit had put Doc's system to an outrageous test. Meals had been infrequent, sleep fitful, emotions on stilts, and the intake of alcohol enormous. The raffle had jarred him out of a pleasant swimming state into something resembling sobriety, but not very closely. A fog of unreality like a dream feeling was not in him but all round him. He went inside the Palace and saw the dwarfs and monsters and the preposterous Hazel all lit by the flickering lanterns. None of it seemed the fabric of sweet reality. The music was deafening. Old Jay danced by, clutching a pale brunette to his stomach as though she were a pain—a disgusting sight, and as unreal as the rest.

Anyone untrained in tom-wallagers might well have been

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startled at this tom-wallager. Eddie waltzed to the rumba music, his arms embracing an invisible partner. Wide Ida lay on the floor, Indian-wrestling with Whitey No. 2, at each try displaying acres of pink panties, while a wild conga line of dwarfs and animals milled about. Johnny Carriaga ran wild. Standing on a box, he fired at random but not at unsuspecting hearts. Mrs. Alfred Wong had a rubber-tipped arrow stuck between her shoulder-blades. Then Johnny winged a lantern, and it crashed in flames and set fire to three dwarfs, so that they had to be put out with a punch-bowl.

Mack and Doc were swept into the conga line. To Doc the room began to revolve slowly and then to rise and fall like the deck of a stately ship in a ground swell. The music roared and tinkled. Hazel beat out rhythm on the stove with his sword until Johnny, aiming carefully, got a bull's-eye on Hazel. Hazel leapt in the air and came down on the oven door, scattering crushed ice all over the floor. One of the guests had got wedged in the grandfather clock. From the outside, the Palace Flophouse seemed to swell and subside like rising bread.

Doc cupped his hands close to Mack's ear. "Where's Fauna and the girls?" he shouted.

"Later," Mack cried.

"What?"

"Coming later," and he added. "Better get here pretty soon before the joint burns down."

"What?"

"Skip it," Mack shouted.

At this point Whitey No. 2 fought his way to Mack's side and yelled, "Mack, they're coming!"

Mack rushed to the band and raised both hands at them. Johnny aimed his last arrow at the guitarón and took the fret out clean.

"Hold it!" Mack screamed.

The music stopped, and silence fell on the room. Then the unrealest part of all began to happen.

Very softly the sound of a sweet muted trumpet whispered, and the crazy thing was playing the *Wedding March* from *Lohengrin*, and even as Doc listened, the sly brass began playing with it, slid into the minor key, took a short rhythm ride, and moaned away at blues. The dancers were very still, almost stuffed. Doc found the source of the music—Cacahuete Rivas in the corner of the room, muting his trumpet with a damp sponge.

Then in this dream the paint-splashed curtain was pulled aside, and Fauna, the witch, came through the outer door, straddling a broom.

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Doc thought, Lord, I'd hate to testify about this. I'd get the booby-hatch!

Fauna barked, "This here's a very happy occasion." She looked around. "Doc, come here."

He moved vaguely towards her.

Four girls from the Bear Flag came through the door, dressed in blinding colours. They ranged themselves two on each side of the door, facing inwards, holding their beribboned whisky bottles to make an arch.

Fauna dismounted from her broom and ripped off her black wrapper, displaying a sheath of silver lamé. In her hand miraculously appeared a silver wand tipped with a gold star. She struck a pose, riding on her toes as though prepared for flight. "I am your fairy godmother," she shouted, "I bring you Snow White, the bride!"

Then Suzy appeared in the doorway, a transformed Suzy in a wedding-gown. The silver crown was on her head, and from its points a veil was suspended. She looked lovely and young and excited. Her lips were parted.

Fauna yelled, "Doc, come get your girl!"

Doc shook his head to try to wake up. It was a dream, a craziness, the crown, the veil, the virginity. "What in hell is going on?"

It happens that two people standing apart can dip into each other's thoughts. Suzy read his mind or his face. An embarrassed red crept up her neck and darkened her cheeks. She closed her eyes.

And Doc's mind read her pain. His world spun like a top. He heard himself say, "Fairy Godmother, I accept—my—girl."

Suzy opened her eyes and looked in Doc's eyes. Then her jaw muscles tightened and her eyes grew fierce, her sweet mouth hardened to a line. She took off the crown and veil, looked at them a moment, and placed them gently on an apple box.

The crazy trumpet put a samba beat to the *Wedding March* and a guitar took up the throbbing.

"Listen, you mugs," said Suzy over the music, "I could live with a tramp under a hedge and be a good wife. I could marry a yellow dog and be nice to him. But good lord! Not Doc!"

Suddenly she turned and darted out of the door.

Fauna plunged after her. There was no chicken-walk out the back way. Suzy slipped and rolled down the embankment, and Fauna rolled after her. On the railway track they gathered themselves together. "You goddam-bitch!" said Fauna bitterly. "What do you mean—'not Doc?'"

"I love him," said Suzy.

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DR. HORACE DORMODY hated night calls, like everybody else, but Doc was his friend and he responded to the frenzied voice on the telephone. In the Lab he looked at Doc's white face and then at his right arm.

"It's broken all right. I don't know how badly. Think you could get to my car? I want to X-ray."

And later he said, "Well, that's that. It's clean and it will take time. Now, tell me your cock-and-bull story again."

"I was asleep," said Doc. "Only thing I can think is that I must have turned over and it was caught between the cot and the wall."

"You mean you weren't in a fight?"

"I tell you I was asleep. What are you grinning about? What's so funny?"

Dr. Horace said, "Have it your own way. It's none of my business. The tissue over the break is smashed."

"I can't have it!" Doc cried. "I've got to go for specimens to La Jolla tomorrow for the spring tides!"

"And turn over rocks?"

"Sure."

"Try and do it," said Dr. Horace. "Is the cast getting hot?"

"Yes," said Doc despondently.

How did the word spread about Doc's arm? Who knows? Fauna heard it with her curlers. Alice, Mabel, and Becky got it with their orange juice. Wide Ida was siphoning Pine Canyon whisky into Old Crow bottles when she heard it.

Mack and the boys had the news early, and it gave them something pressing to do.

It was well into the morning before Suzy heard that Doc had broken his arm.

Mack was first on the scene. He didn't even put on his shoes. He regarded the new cast, which still hadn't cooled off, and listened to the only explanation Doc could think of—that he had got his arm caught between the cot and the wall.

"What're you going to do?" Mack asked.

"I don't know. I have to get south, I have to!"

Mack was about to make an offer when a thought came to him that made him say, "Maybe something'll turn up." He bolted for the Palace Flophouse.

Just before noon the express delivery-man picked his unaccustomed way up the chicken-walk to the Palace Flophouse.

"I got a great big crate for you guys," he said. "I ain't got no call to deliver it up a rope-ladder. Come on down and get it."

"It's here!" Mack cried.

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Hazel and Mack were wrestling the big wooden case up the chicken-walk when Eddie joined them.

" Suzy's come! " he cried. " I came with her. Seemed like she was about to take off any minute. She's in there with him now."

" Give us a hand," said Mack. " How's she look? "

" Fireball," said Eddie.

They carried the case into the Palace and Mack attacked it with a hand-axe.

" There she is," he said when the lid was off.

" She's with Doc. Say, what've you got? "

" Look! " said Mack.

And he and the boys gazed down on the instrument, the great black tube of an eight-inch reflector, eye-pieces socketed beside it, and its tripod cradled.

" Biggest one in the whole damn catalogue," said Mack proudly. " Gee, Doc'll be happy! Eddie, tell us everything that happened, don't leave nothing out."

Again it was a Sweet Thursday in the spring. The sun took a leap towards summer and loosed the furled petals of the golden poppies.

Before noon you could smell the spice of blue lupins from the fields around Fort Ord.

What a day it was! A day of purple and gold, the proud colours of the Salinas High School. A squadron of baby angels manœuvred at twelve hundred feet, holding a pink cloud on which the word J-O-Y flashed on and off. A seagull with a broken wing took off and flew straight up into the air, squawking, " Joy! Joy! "

Suzy was ahead of her racing feet when Eddie intercepted her. She answered yes and no to Eddie's casual comments on the weather, but not only did she not hear the comments, she didn't know Eddie was beside her.

She went up the steps of the Western Biological without seeing Whitey No. 2 standing guard with a sashweight. Her coming relieved him of a duty, but he stuck around to hear.

At the top of the steps Suzy became a breathless, shy girl, and, as anybody knows, there is nothing more indestructible and deadly than a shy young girl.

She paused to get her breath and then knocked on the door and went in and forgot to close the door. Which was good for Whitey No. 2.

Doc was sitting on his cot gloomily regarding the pile of collecting paraphernalia on the floor.

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" I heard you was hurt," Suzy said gently. " I came to see if there was anything I could do."

For a moment Doc's face lightened, then gloom descended. " This shoots the spring tides," he said, staring at the white cast. " I don't know what I'll do."

" Does it hurt much? " Suzy asked.

" Some. It will hurt more later, I guess."

" I'll go down to La Jolla with you."

" And turn over rocks that weigh fifty or a hundred pounds? "

" I ain't put together with spit," said Suzy.

" Can you drive a car? "

" Sure," said Suzy.

" You can't do it," he said. And then, from way down in the deep part of him, there came a bubbling shout, " Sure you can! I need you, Suzy. I need you to go with me. It will be terribly hard work and I'm pretty near helpless."

" You can tell me what to do and what to look for."

" Sure I can. And I'm not entirely helpless. I can use my left hand."

" It's a cinch," said Suzy. " When do we start? "

" I've got to go tonight. If we drive all night we can make the tide at seven-eighteen tomorrow morning. Think you can make it? "

" Cinch," said Suzy. " If you need me."

" I need you all right. I'd be lost without you. But you'll be a tired kid."

" Who cares? " said Suzy.

" I want to ask you something," said Doc. " Old Jay has set up a foundation for me at Cal. Tech."

" Why not? "

" I don't have to work there."

" Fine."

" I don't know whether I oughtn't to throw it in his face."

" Why don't you? "

" On the other hand, there's all the wonderful equipment."

" Fine," said Suzy.

" I don't like to work for anybody."

" Give it back."

" But there's an invitation to read my paper before the Academy of Science."

" Do it then."

" I don't know whether I can even write the paper. What shall I do, Suzy? "

" What do you want to do? "

" I don't know."

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" What's wrong with that? Say, Doc, I've got to do a couple of things. Take me maybe two hours. That too long? "

" Just as long as we start by evening."

" I'll come back soon's I finish."

Doc said, " Suzy, I love you."

She was headed for the door. She whirled and faced him. Her brows were straight and her mouth taut. Then she took a slow breath and her lips became full and turned up at the corners and her eyes shone with incredible excitement.

" Brother," said Suzy, " you've got yourself a girl! "

In the Palace Flophouse, Suzy sat on a straight chair surrounded by the boys. She wore a look of furious concentration. Her feet were on two bricks and she held a barrel-hoop in her hands. Propped in front of her was a board on which were chalked " ignition key," " speedometer," " choke," and " petrol gauge." On the floor on her right side stood an apple box with a mop-handle sticking upright out of it.

" Try her again," said Mack. " Turn the key and reach up with your right toe for the starter."

Suzy put her foot on a chalk spot on the floor.

" Chug-a-chug-a-chug," said Hazel happily.

" Push out your clutch."

Suzy pushed her left foot down on a brick.

" Now bring the gear to you and back."

She moved the mop-handle to low gear.

" Ease up the gas and let in the clutch. Now clutch out, away from you and forward. Give it gas. Now clutch out and straight back. There, you done it good. Now do it again."

At the end of an hour and a half Suzy had driven the straight chair roughly a hundred and fifty miles.

" You'll do all right," said Mack. " Take it slow. If you can get two miles out of town without ramming into something, you can tell him the truth. He ain't going to turn back then. He'll tell you what to do. I'll get her started and kind of lined up with the street."

" You're a bunch of nice guys," said Suzy.

" That's the least we can do for Doc. Come on, now—whang her through the gears again! "

The evening was as lovely as the day had been. The setting sun pinked up the little white-caps on the bay and shone on the serious pelicans pounding home to the sea rocks. The metal cannery walls seemed a soft and precious platinum.

Doc's old car stood in front of the Western Biological, its back seat loaded with buckets and pans and nets and crowbar. All

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Cannery Row was there. Fauna's hair blazed in the setting sun. The girls gave Suzy little hugs. Becky was in romantic tears.

Doc held a list in his hand and checked equipment.

Only Mack and the boys were missing. And here they came down the chicken-walk, balancing among them the tripod and the long black tube. They set the tripod down beside the car.

Mack cleared his throat. " Friends," he said, " on behalf of I and the boys, it gives me pleasure to present Doc with this here."

Doc looked at the gift—a telescope strong enough to bring the moon to his lap. His mouth fell open. Then he smothered the laughter that rose in him.

" Like it? " said Mack.

" It's beautiful."

" Biggest one in the whole damn catalogue," said Mack.

Doc's voice was choked. " Thanks," he said. He paused. " After all, I guess it doesn't matter whether you look down or up—as long as you look."

" We'll put her inside for you," said Mack. " Give me one of them pints. To Doc! " he cried. And under his breath he whispered to Suzy, " Turn the key. Now, starter."

The ancient engine roared. Doc was sipping from a pint.

" Clutch out—to you and back," Mack said. " Let in the clutch."

Suzy did.

The old car deliberately climbed the kerb, ripped off the stairs of the Western Biological, careened into the street, and crawled away, scattering lumber as it went.

Doc turned in the seat and looked back. The disappearing sun shone on his laughing face, his gay and eager face. With his left hand he held the bucking steering-wheel. Cannery Row looked after the ancient car. It made the first turn and was gone from sight behind a warehouse just as the sun was gone.

Fauna said, " I wonder if I'd be safe to put up her gold star tonight."

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INCENTIVE

The face of the crag grinned back at me, black, malevolent, mocking

by DUDLEY HOYS

WHEN I first glimpsed the two figures on Slight Side, I thought they were wearing white caps. They were nearing the ridge north of Horn Crag, but moving so slowly it was hard to detect any upward progress. After a casual glance or two, I paid them no more attention. Between early spring and the back end, scarcely a day passes without a few fell-walkers plodding up Scafell.

Eb, Joe, and I had come out to gather the ewes for clipping, and two months of summer browsing on high with their lambs had sharpened their taste for freedom. Unlike most breeds, our Herdwicks have no communal urge on the fell, but prefer their own airy solitudes. So the dogs were kept busy.

"E-Fleet! The-ere! E-Gyp! Cope! Co-ope!"

Ay, it was hard work combing the heathery hummocks, scree shoots, outcrops of crag, the slopes of feathery green brackens, the wet spots where cotton-grass and bog-myrtle trembled in the wind, and all the other features that go to make our fell-grazing stint into a high-pitched chaos capable of hiding an army.

Eb had taken the right flank, overlooking the dale. Joe was in the centre, receiving the sheep and keeping them on the move. Half a mile to the left of him, I was scouring the broken country that mounts in rocky terraces towards the skirts of Scafell.

We reckoned it a good day for gathering, very cold for the end of June, but sharply bright. In the sunshine, the air had a lulling warmth. In the shadow, the east-south-east wind fairly prickled the skin. The outlines of the high peaks might have been cut in metal, and away to the west the Irish Sea was a glittering blue carpet. The only clouds were thin wisps that occasionally smeared the long ridge and summit of Scafell. They had the colour of smoke, and that meant they were likely spattering the tops with sleet. It would be bitter up there whenever those clouds swept over, a blind, stinging rawness.

We reached the turn of the gather, about halfway up Slight Side, a name conveying a world of understatement, for that great bank is two miles long, fifteen hundred feet higher than the moor

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below, and a mass of boulders. The two white dots were no longer visible. I supposed they were well on their way up the long, splintery rise that ends at the cairn.

We swung westward, keeping our relative positions, Joe trudging behind a bobbing, blaring caravan of woolly bodies. My dog Gyp gave a yelp and went lolloping away like mad. Fifty yards ahead flowed a fine dog-fox, the reek of it was in my nose.

Gyp knows his sheep job, and had I bawled: "E-Gyp, bide!" he would have abandoned the chase. But his excitement was also mine. Up the rough slope I scuttled, yelling encouragement, and knapping the brass toe-caps of my clogs against the stones. The hunt lasted two or three minutes. At the end, the fox was out of sight, Gyp was trailing back with heaving flanks, and I was squatting on a boulder, trying to suck in some breath.

While I sat there, another sound reached me, a gasping and clattering. I looked round to see an elderly, bald-headed man hurrying down the slope. His scalp was so white that at a distance it could have been taken for a cap. He came blundering up to me, his eyes scared and distressed. He said, "Come quick! It's urgent." For seconds he panted, and went on, "We've got to have a rope. It's the only way we can pull him clear."

I said: "What's wrong?"

"It's the Professor, Professor Hurst, my companion. He's stuck on a ledge there. He can't get up and he can't get down."

"Whereabouts?"

"On the east side of that ridge," he said, pointing, "is a sort of buttress. He's about forty feet down it."

I knew where he meant, and I whistled. Dow Buttress drops in an ugly curve. Rock-climbers avoid it, and nobody but a fool would tackle such a spot. I said so, and he gave a helpless twist with his hands. "I know. I scrambled back—heaven knows how—but he's tired out, and his nerve's failed."

"I'm not surprised. You must have been gey daft to go down yonder. What made you do it?"

He explained in quick, jerky sentences. He and Hurst had been staying on holiday in the dale. Hurst was an ardent botanist. Somebody had mentioned that a rare plant, the alpine campion, might be found on the Scafell ridges. Though the walk was really beyond his powers, Hurst had insisted on going up, and had claimed that the buttress was a likely spot.

Again the bald man made that helpless gesture. "He's seventy-three. And it's terribly cold there in the shadow. If we don't get him off soon—"

I said, "There doesn't seem much chance, but I'll do what I can. I'll go on up, and maybe I can clamber down to him.

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You run on to yon chap." I indicated Joe, crossing a distant hummock. "Tell him all you know, and tell him to fetch a rope. But I warn you, it'll take him a full hour to reach the dale and get one, and nearly two hours to land back on this ridge."

He gave me a dismayed glance, and nodded, and set off after Joe. I sent Gyp back, for a dog would be no use on that buttress.

Presently I was emerging from the shelter of the stony breast and coming out upon the unprotected spine that tilts north and south. Here the wind had a gusty rhythm, the bite of it tempered by the warm sun. Far below, Great Moss was a golden greenery threaded by the Esk. It looked fair and kind and summery, and stressed the contrast of Dow Buttress flinging itself down in a great canopy of cold shadow. Where the top of the buttress curves away from the ridge, the first pitches are mild, a series of descending ledges, with patches of bents here and there, and the tiny gold stars of tormentil peeping between them.

I could understand how this man Hurst had been tempted by the reasonable innocence of the slope. But he should never have gone below the last easy ledge. I stood on this, and looked beneath, and saw him. He was crouching on a shelf some eighteen inches wide, a thin, bony, white-haired old man wearing a green tweed jacket, grey flannel trousers, and town shoes. Behind his gold spectacles his eyes seemed to be closed. To reach him meant hanging from the shelf by the full stretch of the arms and dropping.

As I landed by his side, he opened flinching blue eyes. He was stiff with cold and fear. I said: "Listen. It'll take three hours to get a rope to you. You'll be fettled before then. Come on, I'm going to get you up the way you came down."

His lips stirred, and he whispered: "No, no, I can't."

"You can. Pull yourself together. Forget the drop. Think of something else. What's this flower you're so daft about?"

He tried to smile. "Lychnis alpina. Bromilow vows it's never been found up here. If I could have found it—"

He dared to turn his eyes, and stared into space. Dizziness took him by the throat, and I thought he was going to be sick. It was no good pitying him; what he needed was goading.

I said harshly, "If you want to end your holiday alive, you'll do as I tell you. You're going to stand up, I'm going to give you a shove higher, and you'll grip that shelf above. D'you hear?"

He made a small moaning noise. The wind rose to a shriller note, and a scarf of cloud rushed across at us. The next moment we were among dank blindness and the flail of sleet. The spell was very short, but as it passed on and the world grew visible again, I was blowing on my numbed hands.

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I took him by the waist and pulled him to his feet. "Don't look down. Raise your arms, do as I say. I'm going to bunk you up, and you must grab at that ledge."

His body slumped abruptly as if the strings of the joints had been cut. The weight of him sinking downwards and outwards nearly sent me over the edge. He crumpled back to where he had been crouching, and I wondered what on earth to do next. Panic had sapped him to a limp sloppiness.

He mumbled: "I'm done. You'd better leave me."

I peered over the lip of the ledge. Though the rock face beneath was sheer, there were several cracks and flakes, working away diagonally, that offered handholds. A roped climber could have tackled them confidently. They led to another shelf, below which, I knew, was a second sheer face descending to a narrow ledge. Directly beneath, a chimney funnelled down some fifty feet to a fan of scree. Once on the scree, there would be nothing more to worry about. It struck me as a case of kill or cure. I could never get him back to the top. A second shot at it might fling us both over the edge.

I gripped his arm almost viciously. "You're coming down. Ay. Imagine you're going to find this alpine campion. Maybe that'll help."

A smile flickered over his queasy mouth, the smile of a fanatic. "Ah, that indeed would be—"

I had to do it. I swung my leg over the edge, hung on with one hand, gave his ankle a tugging jerk. He screamed, and scrabbled wildly with his fingers, and there he hung suspended from the lip of the shelf.

"Keep your eyes shut. I'm going first. I'll steer your feet. Lower one hand at a time, and feel for holds." Another whistling cloud of sleet enveloped us. In a way, it was a help: it masked the empty space below. The eyes are the begetters of terror on high. The most timid will cross a plank a foot above ground; set it at a hundred feet, and their senses reel.

Before the sleet cloud had thinned away, we were on the next shelf. Trembling, he dabbed at his moist glasses, and in the act, happened to look down. I believed I was witnessing a miracle, for his eyes widened with radiance, and his stupor changed to exaltation. "Lychnis alpina! By all that's wonderful!"

He was letting himself down to that meagre ledge below as if on a safe staircase. I followed much more carefully, while he grubbed up a scrap of plant and put it away in a small tin box.

"This is a triumph! This is something to flaunt before that insufferable Bromilow!"

"Who's he?" I asked. The old chap gave a delighted laugh.

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" So his fame's not as widespread as he imagines. Excellent! Bromilow's a botanist who believes himself infallible."

He bent his head to survey the next descent. " Come, we must be getting along." He considered that vertical chimney, and said in an assured voice, " Yes, yes. We can get down inside that, working our shoulders and elbows as wedges."

Without hesitating, he lowered himself and wormed his way, face outwards, into the crack. He might have been a fearless, agile boy. I let out a grateful breath. The challenge of crisis was over. But with it had gone my incentive.

I went down after him, with a sense of tension. Though boasting a head for heights, I have never cared for these chimneys. The thin, empty drop of them tends to drag at my stomach.

Ramming with shoulders and elbows, and feeling for holds with my toes, I got about ten feet down. My eyes followed the sweep of the crag face. The sheerness began to waver, and I glanced quickly away, down at the remote hollow of Great Moss. It was pulling at me, ay, sucking me outwards. My knees turned to water. Sweat drenched my temples, and the whole fell started to sway, as if it meant to toss me into space.

I shut my eyes, and the fell went on heaving. I opened them, and high away to the left, Ill Crag grinned at me, black, malevolent, mocking. Saliva was squeezing out through the sides of my lips. My hands jammed against the walls of the chimney, jammed without strength. I had no courage to move, no courage to hold on. I was on the brink of toppling outwards.

Something pressed hard against my thighs. It was the upstretched hand of the Professor.

" I can't make it," I muttered and, but for his restraining hand, would have pitched down onto the scree.

" Nonsense," he said. " It's quite secure. Keep your shoulders and elbows well out. There are plenty of footholds. In a minute you'll be down." He patted my right boot.

I reached the scree somehow, and sat waiting with closed eyes for the world to steady itself.

The Professor stood gloating over his tin. " Lychnis alpina! Lychnis alpina! Truly, what a wonderful day this is! I must get back at once to the dale and wire that insufferable Bromilow. Are you ready? "

I nodded, laughing with relief, and went with him.

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ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, *why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?*

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POETS' CORNER

The Poet—every woman's eternal dream, every publisher's perpetual nightmare

F. A. CLEWLEY, *Table Talk*

He sometimes turned his own Thoughts into Verse, while he was at Work; and at last begun to venture those Thoughts a little on Paper. What he did of this kind, was very inconsiderable; only scatter'd Thoughts, and generally not above four or five Lines on the same Subject; which, as there was nobody thereabouts that car'd for Verses, nor any body that could tell him whether they were good or bad, he generally flung into the Fire, as soon as he had pleas'd himself enough in reading them.

JOSEPH SPENCE, *An Account of the Author, in Poems on Several Occasions, by Stephen Duck*, 1736

Hard Lines

night after night i have written poetry for you
on your typewriter
and this big brute of a rat who used to be a poet
comes out of his hole when it is done
and reads it and sniffs at it
he is jealous of my poetry
he used to make fun of it when we were both human
he was a punk poet himself
and after he has read it he sneers
and then he eats it

Don Marquis, archy and mehitabel

Influence

"A poet," said Mr. Bevan, "should carry his verses in his head."

"I remember them all right," I said.

"Recite me your latest one; I'm always very interested."

"What a gathering," Mrs. Jenkyn said, "poets, musicians, preachers. We only want a painter now, don't we?"

"I don't think you'll like the very latest one," I said.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Bevan, smiling, "I am the best judge of that."

"Frivolous is my hate," I said, wanting to die, watching Mr. Bevan's teeth.

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Singed with bestial remorse
Of unfulfilment of desired force,
And lust of tearing late;

Now could I raise
Her dead, dark body to my own
And hear the joyous rustle of her bone
And in her eyes see deathly blaze;

Now could I wake
To passion after death, and taste
The rapture of her hating, tear the waste
Of body. Break, her dead, dark body, break.

Dan kicked my shins in the silence before Mr. Bevan said: "The influence is obvious, of course. 'Break, break, break, on thy cold, grey stones, O sea.'"

"Hubert knows Tennyson backwards," said Mrs. Bevan, "backwards."

DYLAN THOMAS, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*

Free Verse

A man may live on air as soon as poetry
Unless he happens to possess a name.
Poetry is a thing about as saleable
As warming-pans in Abyssinia.

JAMES HURNARD, *The Setting Sun*, 1870

Olympian Heights

The unhappy poet climbed up in disconsolate mood to his garret, where he found his wife cooking the scrag end of mutton for dinner. The mansions of this son of Apollo were very contracted . . . In one corner of these poetical appartments stood a flock-bed, and underneath it, a green jordan presented itself to the eye . . . Three rotten chairs and a half seemed to stand like traps in various parts of the room, threatening downfalls to unwary strangers; and one solitary table in the middle of this aerial garret served to hold the different treasures of the whole family. There were now lying on it the first act of a comedy, a pair of yellow stays, two political pamphlets, a plate of bread-and-butter, three dirty night-caps, and a volume of miscellany poems . . . Such were the mansions of Mr. Rhymer, the poet, which I heartily recommend to the repeated perusal of those unhappy gentlemen who feel in themselves a growing inclination to that mischievous, damnable, and destructive science.

FRANCIS COVENTRY, *History of Pompey the Little*, 1751

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The Second Part of

CAPTAIN LIGHTFOOT

★ ★ by W. R. BURNETT ★ ★

DOHERTY, a ghost of his former self, was in the middle of the room, swinging an old cutlass through the air and making it whistle dangerously.

Michael stared open-mouthed as the faithful old servant Trim and his son pleaded with Doherty to drop the weapon and get back into bed, but Doherty, who was making a havoc of the room, seemed not to hear them or even to see them; nor did he notice Michael. He whistled the cutlass over his head and cried: "Stand back. Keep your distance. You will find it is not so easy to overcome Doherty as you thought. What—you advance?" Doherty made the cutlass whistle and opened a huge gaping wound in the back of a brocaded chair. "Stand back. Back! Or I'll open you up like a carcass at the knacker's yard. Back!"

"He fights with the phantoms of the mind," said old Trim sadly. But Trim II said: "No. With the Dark Gentleman himself, I think."

"I'll not go," cried Doherty, on guard. "You can't take me against my will. Stand back!"

And suddenly Michael understood with whom Doherty was fighting, and this shocking spectacle turned suddenly macabre for him, and with a shiver of dread he thought that he discerned an evil presence in the room—and suddenly he crossed himself and murmured a prayer under his breath.

And at that moment Doherty's eyes seemed to clear, and turning from his opponent, he caught a glimpse of Michael and cried: "Run for it, lad. Run. This time you can't help Doherty," and the cutlass slipped from his hand and hit the thick carpet with a muffled thud, and Doherty slipped to the floor sideways, sagging suddenly like an emptied sack, then rolled over on his side.

Trim II ran immediately for the doctor, while Michael and old

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The time is 1817. Michael Martin, a wild young Irishman, plays a dangerous prank when he holds up Lord Devereaux's factor, Angus Desmond, intending to distribute his rent money among the poorer members of the "Five Minus One," a Leinster secret society. The leader, Regis Donnell, expels him. Wanted for the capital offence of highway robbery, Michael leaves Ballymoure—and Catherine O'Herlihy, the lovely, black-haired village beauty whose affections had till now seemed equally divided between the sober Regis and the reckless Michael.

On his way, he falls in with the famous gentleman of the road, Captain Doherty, who takes Michael to Nine Steps, the thieves' kitchen of Dublin, where Big Tom and Mahony stand guard. There he grooms Michael for the part of Captain Lightfoot, and introduces him to Lady Anne More, who runs Doherty's gambling house, and is said to be his sister. Michael also meets Araminta McDonald, whose provocative beauty and lively ways attract him strongly.

One night, the High Constable's men invade the place, which has to close down. Michael is freed from prison by Lord Clayton, one of Doherty's best customers—Doherty himself has escaped arrest. Later, Clagett, an informer, tells them that Sir George Bracey brought this misfortune about. They pay a visit of revenge; Bracey is killed by Doherty, himself sorely wounded; and the two friends flee to Scotland.

Doherty arrives home in Glasgow in a state of collapse, with dangerously high fever. One night, Michael hears ominous sounds from below, and goes down to investigate . . .

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Trim lifted Doherty back into bed. But in reality they were not lifting Doherty back into bed at all—that strange complex of mental, spiritual, and emotional qualities known in the world as Captain Doherty had left them, and had now set out on another journey, a journey more hazardous than any he had gone before. What remained on the bed was of no use to anyone, an inert puppet.

"He's gone," murmured old Trim, finally.

"Ay," said Michael, and then he went back to his room and stood at the window, looking out into the gusty Glasgow morning,

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and he did not even stir when he heard Trim II return with the doctor. Bustle and grief were alike useless, but it was with a pronounced shock that he recognized this.

And now what? Dublin? Michael felt a terrible inadequacy and longed for Doherty's commanding voice and reassuring presence.

After the funeral, as they drove away in the calash, Trim II sighed heavily. " Well, sir, we're for it now."

Michael turned and looked at him. " How is that? "

" Oh, I talked with the Captain night after night," said Trim. " I know your plans."

After a long pause, Michael said: " I'm aware I can never take his place. I can but try."

" I'm with you, sir," Trim replied. " I promised him, and that's good enough for me."

They picked up their horses at Prestwick and shipped out from Ayr on a fine big boat, the *Allen Davy* of Belfast. The green water was smooth as glass, and the day was wonderful with a mild southern breeze and a warm sun and great banks of sculptured, snowy clouds. Michael could not believe that he was crossing the same stretch of water. Jewels of light danced on the surface, and the motion of the ship was so faint that he might have been in a house except for the wild, heady smell of deep water.

The next morning, standing in the bow, Michael saw the grey smoke of Belfast staining the greenish western sky. He felt a rising excitement. Little by little the real optimism of his nature was asserting itself. " We'll see, we'll see," he said, addressing the morning and the cloud of gulls that had flown out to welcome the ship, many of them lighting in the rigging. " I'm sound, I'm young, and I have had the tutelage of the greatest man I ever hope to meet."

The journey down from Belfast was completely uneventful— the sort of journey any gentleman and his serving-man might make along the highways of the day. It was after sundown and misty when they reached Dublin and crossed the big bridge over the Liffey, whose water, giving off faint, dullish glints, was the colour of a pewter tankard; and along the far shore the lamplighter was lighting the river-lamps, one by one, and the yellow bars of light falling over the river, one after another, seemed to mark the gradual approach of darkness from the direction of the hidden bay, as if night itself came in eastward from the sea.

And now the familiar jam, rush, and clatter of Dublin streets, and the commotion of a score of red-coated dragoons riding northward on some portentous errand—and the eternal gigs and carts— and then the narrow streets, the masts and spars of the quays, and at long last the Dublin of Nine Steps just waking to boisterous life as the day faded.

Word of their arrival had moved ahead of them along the mysterious grape-vine of the stews, and when they dismounted at the stable behind the inn, there was a crowd of men to meet them; and Michael saw old Mahony and Big Tom himself and half a dozen other familiar faces, with Bessa, the negro maid, hiding

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shyly in the background and flashing her row of ivory teeth at him. And Big Tom shouted: "It's Trim." And then to Michael: "And Doherty himself? His premonition was right, then."

And Michael nodded slowly, and a great solemn silence spread at once over this group of hard-faced men, and finally Mahony said: "Ah, well. 'Tis best to leave so, still full of power. It's all downhill after forty."

Bessa brought Michael's supper, and Michael, remembering Doherty's generosity, gave her a guinea, which delighted her to such an extent that she danced lithely about the room, clapping her hands in time and showing her big teeth, until Trim, having had enough of it, eased her out, then began to serve Michael at his table by the window.

Big Tom brought the coffee himself, and Michael invited him to sit at the table, but Big Tom declined with thanks and stood by while Michael finished his supper. Trim withdrew.

"It was a great thing to bring Trim," said Big Tom. "You'll need him, and he's a man you can count on. And now, Captain, I'd like to speak of important matters if I may."

"Go ahead, Tom," said Michael, sipping his coffee.

"Well, sir, I'm in touch with Lady Anne, and she's wishful to see you. The new Mansion is ready to open, but there are problems she wants to discuss with you. Could you go to see her tonight?"

"I'll go to Lady Anne as soon as I finish here."

"Good," said Big Tom. "We'll be ready."

Big Tom left and Trim came back. Michael explained about his plans, and Trim nodded; then he said: "And Ara?"

Michael looked at Trim blankly. "How did you know about Ara, Trim?" he asked.

"Oh, through the master, of course."

This was all very puzzling to Michael, but he didn't pursue it.

Lady Anne lived on the second floor of a huge old grey stone building that had been the mansion of an extremely rich English shipowner of the 1750's.

Michael, leaving Trim below with the coach, climbed a wide curving stairway, screened off from the immense and gloomy entrance hall, and knocked at a neat white door on the second floor. After a moment, a middle-aged Irishwoman with coarse red hair and a wide, flat, pleasant face opened to his knock. She was wearing a neat frilled cap and a big white apron. She looked at him inquiringly, her blue eyes bright and young in her weathered face.

"Captain Martin," said Michael, rather sharply, because he was embarrassed at referring to himself so.

"Ah, Captain," said the woman, "I'm Mary—at your service, sir. I've heard so much about you."

She admitted him and took his hat. There was something about her manner of speaking that stabbed at his memory, and he asked: "Kilkenny?"

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"Ay," said Mary, grinning. "Blackfountain."

"Blackfountain, is it?" laughed Michael. "A town of rogues and ruffians. I've raced horses there."

"Ay. And so have all the other young good-for-nothings, I'll warrant."

Michael had a mind to kiss her. Here was home incarnate, in a plain female face, a coarse mop of red hair, and a manner. Laughing, he put his arm around her big waist and gave her a bear-hug. "And how is it with you in the great city of Dublin, Mary?"

Mary returned the hug with surprising strength. "Can't complain, though the place is full of jiggling foreign fools."

"Why did you come here?"

"My husband was killed dead in the Army, Captain. So what was I to do—stay a widow in Blackfountain, where the men are so scarce?"

"And the Dublin men?"

"I've married two since, neither worth his salt. And now I am wiser and live single and have my money to keep instead of having it spent for me by a drunken lout and the back of his hand for thanks."

They were hugging each other and laughing when a door opened and Lady Anne came out into the little hallway and stood staring. She was wearing an elegant black velvet gown, cut very low at the neck and showing nearly half of her plump bosom, and her pale blonde hair was piled high and gorgeously arranged, with a slim white plume and some glittering jewellery. She was nearly as tall as Michael and very grand and impressive in appearance.

Mary disengaged herself with a loud laugh, then composed her face. "Captain Martin, m'lady," she said.

Lady Anne curtsied with studied grace, and Michael bowed as Doherty had taught him. She turned to Mary. "Tell Araminta she will be wanted in the drawing-room presently—and arrange your cap."

"The Captain was roughing me, m'lady." Mary curtsied, smiling broadly. "Like all the boys from home, he has a rough hand with the girls."

Lady Anne turned and went into a little white drawing-room, where there were a pleasant coal fire in the grate, candles in tall candelabra, a harpsichord, and several large, gold-framed pictures. Michael winked at Mary, who was regarding him impishly, and followed Lady Anne.

At a grand gesture from herself Michael sat down opposite Lady Anne.

"It was a great blow to Ara and myself, Captain—Doherty's passing. We've had a note from Big Tom. It was worded most graciously. Of course, we were prepared. Doherty wrote us many letters. The tone of them prepared us. It was not Doherty writing at all. It was a worried man. Ordinarily, Doherty did not know the meaning of the word." She studied Michael languidly with her mysterious green eyes.

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"You're very young, Captain," said Lady Anne. "But then Doherty had such great faith in you I'm sure your youth will prove no drawback, though we have many problems. The Mansion is ready to open, but I hesitate about it."

"Why?"

"For several reasons. Captain Hood is making himself most obnoxious."

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Michael airily. "I'll talk to the man."

"Of course," said Lady Anne. "But it's deeper than you think. He has strong backing now. His friend, Lord Bracken, is quite rich—and also quite simple-minded, and Hood is a great one for impressing the simple-minded. Captain Hood wants me as a partner—and, to be quite frank, at times I've been tempted. You see, I tell you the truth, Captain. Doherty is one thing, you yourself are another. If I did not need capital, I tell you frankly, Captain, I might consider teaming with Hood, even knowing him for a scoundrel. All men are scoundrels in one way or another."

Michael felt a rising anger, but managed to control it. He studied her narrowly. There was something about the way she spoke that made him think she was not telling the truth, that she was fishing, fencing—something of the kind. Was she trying to test him? Michael decided to speak his mind. "There will be no Captain Hood," he said firmly. "Doherty would turn in his grave."

"And how can you be so sure, Captain Martin?"

"How? I'll not have it, that's how!" said Michael bluntly.

Lady Anne laughed. "What makes you so sure Captain Hood will not gobble you up as he has gobbled up many others? He's a dead shot. He's one of the finest swordsmen in Ireland. And he is six foot, three inches high."

"If he were the devil himself and seven foot high, it would be all one to me," cried Michael.

"Then you won't mind speaking with him tonight?"

"It will be a pleasure!"

There was a long pause. "And then," said Lady Anne at last, "there is Ara. I think she looks not unkindly on Captain Hood."

"That's her affair."

"It is not. She is a very headstrong girl, and might get herself into serious trouble over the Captain. She is eighteen and, true to that age, thinks she knows it all."

"Ara is but eighteen?" Michael was stunned.

"Did you think her an old woman? Yes, eighteen—and she needs a strong masculine hand. Thrash her soundly once and it may be enough."

There was another silence, then Lady Anne broke out: "Why should we keep you in the dark any longer? What Doherty was thinking of not to tell you, I can't imagine. Ara is Doherty's daughter. His natural daughter, and I've been saddled with the imp for years. She was frightened of Doherty and for that reason behaved herself, more or less. But since there is to be no more

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Doherty, you are the nearest thing to a father she has—a sort of guardian, shall we say? "

Doherty's daughter! Michael did not know at the moment what he thought or felt; he knew only that he was confused and interested and deeply agitated.

Michael sighed and looked about him at the pleasant little drawing-room, the discreet fire, the many candles shedding their soft light on the white panelled walls, the faint glimmering of the gold picture-frames . . . did anyone ever thrash a woman in such surroundings?

He glanced up. Lady Anne was regarding him rather oddly, he thought, running her eyes up from his boots to his shining black hair, and then down again, and then studying his face as a painter might or a woman with definite ideas about how the next few minutes were to be spent. " On second thoughts," said Lady Anne, " there is a possibility that thrashing may not be necessary —at least for the time being."

And then she burst out laughing in a surprisingly loud and coarse manner, Michael thought, flushing; and at that moment he heard a faint commotion in the hall and the little white fox-terrier, Princey, ran into the room frisking, and then at a more leisurely pace Ara followed, dressed plainly and neatly, her luxuriant coal-black hair simply arranged, her eyes demurely lowered. She hardly looked eighteen, Michael thought, marvelling. Was this really the girl who had spoken to him so boldly that night at Doherty's Castle?

" Captain Martin, Ara," said Lady Anne. " The Captain would like to speak with you, Ara. Then I must take him away for a while, as we have business."

" I know the business," said Ara quickly, " and I'd like to go with you."

" I think not, Ara." Lady Anne gave her a long ironical look, then turned, and left the room.

" You don't mind if I go with you, do you, Captain—dear one? " wheedled Ara, sitting down beside the fire and snapping her fingers for Princey, who was busy looking Michael over and trying to make up his mind whether to welcome this strange new man or not. The little dog came to her and was patted; then Ara said: " You forget, I see, Captain, and are a little surprised at my being so bold as to call you ' dear one.' And yet that's what you called me the very first and, in fact, the only time we ever met."

Michael sat down, flushing. " Of course I remember. But the circumstances were somewhat different."

Princey came over to him and laid his head on Michael's knee.

" You seem quite a kind man, Captain," said Ara. " Princey took to you at once. Princey runs howling from Captain Hood. I think the Captain kicked him one day when there was no one else about."

" A man who will kick a dog will kick a child," said Michael, his anger rising. " And such a man I would dearly love to kick."

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After a pause, Ara said: " It would be a pity to have you die so young, Captain," and then she burst out laughing, and suddenly the demure schoolgirl air disappeared entirely and her bold black eyes danced, and Michael was sure that he saw something ruthless and Doherty-like in the set of her sturdy small chin.

He sat studying her face, noticing the delicately made but turned-up nose, the rather harsh line of her Kalmuck-like cheek-bones, the small, thick-lipped, sensual mouth, the stormy-looking black brows, the long lashes. In colouring she was somewhat similar to Catherine O'Herlihy, but there the resemblance ended. Ara was no great beauty like Catherine. But there was a subtle animal force in her face entirely lacking in Catherine's, a suggestion of rough weather, sleeping danger, Michael thought.

Her manner was beginning to irritate him. " Ara," he said sharply, " we'll have no more of the Captain Hood business."

" Is that an order? " laughed Ara.

" That's an order. What kind of an unnatural daughter are you, girl—when you know how Doherty felt? "

" I am no kind of unnatural daughter whatever, Captain. I am a *natural* daughter. A bastard, if you prefer."

Now she jumped from her chair and confronted him, her black eyes sparkling with vitality and malice. " An order is it? You think you can order me, you bog-trotter dressed as a gentleman? I laugh at your orders. Do you understand? Fill Doherty's shoes? Not even one of them half as far back as the instep. No more Captain Hood, is it? He will eat you, do you hear what I'm saying? Eat you for supper with a French sauce."

Michael rose suddenly and hit her a hard blow on the cheek with the back of his hand, and she fell to her knees and hid her face and burst into tears, and with a yelp Princey bared his teeth and made a leap for Michael, and there was a great commotion of weeping, cursing, and barking—and at this inauspicious moment Mary came in, glanced about her calmly, and announced: " Captain Hood is asking to speak with you, Miss Araminta."

Ara glanced up at Michael through her fingers, but made no reply. Michael said: " He will speak to me, Mary. Not to Miss Ara." He turned to her. " Go to your room at once, Ara, and take this poor bewildered animal with you."

Mary stared open-mouthed as Ara grabbed up Princey and ran out through a side door, weeping loudly.

In a moment there was a faint rattling as of accoutrements, and Captain Hood stepped in. He was dressed in the uniform of a captain of Uhlans and was wearing a heavy cavalryman's sabre.

" Captain Martin, I believe," said Hood, banging his heels together with a loud rattle and clank of heavy spurs, then bowing with clock-work stiffness like a tightly wound-up toy. He was black-browed, and there was a certain theatrical fierceness about his bearing which, taken together with his tremendous height, made him feared on all sides.

" Captain Hood," said Michael, jerking his head slightly. " Now,

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since we've met, it would please me very much, Captain, if you would leave."

Hood was plainly taken aback. "Leave?"

Michael walked past him and opened the door wide. "Yes, leave," he said harshly. "And don't come back."

Hood looked Michael over carefully, noting the wild glare of icy blue eyes. "But, my dear fellow," he said, "this is preposterous. Heretofore, I've been a welcome guest."

"Maybe," said Michael. "Women alone in a house with no menfolk to protect them are apt to be at a disadvantage. Good day, Captain."

Hood smiled slightly. "You have me at a loss here, Martin. A lady's apartment is scarcely the place for a quarrel."

"Should I step downstairs with you?"

Hood considered this for a moment. "No, on the whole, I think not. This is all very unfortunate. I was hoping perhaps we might see eye to eye about several matters, Martin."

"*Captain* Martin," said Michael.

Hood looked at Michael, then laughed. "These boys learn fast nowadays. They no sooner turn the handles of the plough over to their brothers than they are taking on titles. Well, *Mister* Martin . . . I doubt if there is room for both of us in Dublin."

"Ah well," said Michael, "you're used to living on the Continent."

Hood's eyes flashed; then he bowed stiffly, jingling; and turning abruptly, left the room. In a moment the outer door slammed.

Michael stood gritting his teeth in rage. Farm boy, was he? Bog-trotter? They'd all see before time ran out. He heard a loud giggling, then the side door burst open, Princey ran into the room, barking, and turning, Michael saw that Lady Anne had surprised Ara listening at the key-hole. Now they both came into the drawing-room.

"Well," said Lady Anne, "what a rash young fellow you are! Why, he could split you in a moment with that sabre he wears."

"He was dressed to fight," said Michael contemptuously. "Why didn't he fight, then?"

"Oh, he's subtler than you think."

Michael glanced at Ara, who was looking at him rather strangely, he thought. "Subtle, is it? I'll leave subtlety to women."

Now Ara spoke in her little-girl voice again. "Captain, dear," she said, "let me go along with you and Anne. I want to see the new Mansion. I haven't had a peep yet. Please, may I go?"

Michael studied her as if he'd never seen her before. Had he actually slapped that intriguing feminine face?

Ara came over to him quickly, raised his right hand, and kissed it. "May I go, please, Captain?"

Then, as he still said nothing, she went on: "Captain Hood might come back, and I'd be here all alone with only Mary to protect me. Please, may I go?"

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" Very well. Very well," said Michael stiffly.

He shrugged in irritation as he escorted them out into the hall. So many things all at once for a man to make up his mind about!

The Mansion looked as gloomy as a mausoleum in the flickering light of a few tall candles; all the furniture and pictures were sheeted; and a couple of Doherty's old card-men with blunderbusses were on guard.

Michael was overwhelmed at the size of the place. It was even larger than Doherty's Castle. Lady Anne took him aside.

" We must open at once, or lose it," she said. " The rent's ruinous, and I have less than two thousand guineas for the stake. What shall we do? "

" I have three thousand odd more," said Michael. " Why, we'll open, of course."

" It's a slender stake. We could be wiped out easily by two o'clock."

" Or rich," cried Michael, laughing.

Lady Anne studied his handsome young face in the flickering light cast by the candles. " He's taught you well, Michael," she said. " Or else you are himself reincarnated. He would have spoken exactly so."

Lady Anne leaned forward and kissed Michael on the cheek. " I feel so much better," she said. " We'll open, and be damned to Hood and Lord Bracken."

" Ay," said Michael.

On the way home, Ara went to sleep in the coach with her head on his shoulder. This he found rather pleasant.

On his return, Michael found Lord Clayton awaiting him. The old Lord looked at him narrowly. " Now, now, lad. No formality. Sit down."

Michael, handling his sword with great care, sat on the opposite side of the hearth from Lord Clayton and tried to compose himself. He remembered one time in Ballymoure as a boy hearing how the great Lord Clayton's coach had broken down on the King's highway, and what a to-do and bother there had been.

" You are a singularly silent young man," said Lord Clayton. " Not much on the order of Doherty—a very amusing fellow, by the by. We'll miss him greatly."

" Yes, sir," said Michael.

The old man sighed and sat looking into the fire. His face was covered with a network of fine wrinkles, and his dyed hair made him look older than his years, which were sixty-odd.

Once a force politically, he'd fallen out with George III and his ministers, and was now without office, as well as heavily in debt, though his prestige was still great.

Lord Clayton's pouched dark eyes were world-weary and his body was shrunken with age and dissipation, but there was still something jaunty and commanding about him.

" Captain," he said, after a long silence, " I find myself in a great

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embarrassment for the temporary want of a hundred guineas." He turned and glanced at Michael now. "Don't you find that a comical pass for Lord Clayton, lad?"

"Not at all," said Michael, jumping up at once and going to his desk, sighing with relief that he was able to do something, anything, rather than sit there opposite the great Lord Clayton, frozen with awe. He counted out the guineas quickly, returned, and offered them with a bow.

"Ah, thank you," said Lord Clayton offhandedly, taking them and slipping them carelessly into the outside pocket of his coat. "Money, money. The root of all evil, they say, and yet a man is helpless without it." Sighing, he rose.

Late that night when most of the candles were out and all was deserted, Michael started down the long corridor to his bedroom. A door opposite his own opened noiselessly, and he glanced into a large, dimly lit boudoir. Ara was standing a few feet inside the doorway, wearing nothing but a scanty French lace shift. Michael gave a start at this lovely sight, and then, with his blood pounding, he made at once for her boudoir. But with a sudden and unexpected movement, Ara slammed the door in his face and locked it. Michael drew back to kick the door open, then hesitated. He heard muffled, mocking laughter. Making up his mind at once, he turned on his heel, went to his own room, and shut and locked his door.

Play games, would she? Such antics could be two-sided.

Much later, after he had undressed, blown out the candle, and got into bed, he was certain that he heard the slow and gentle turning of the outer door-handle.

He was laughing as he fell asleep.

The big night had arrived, and the new Mansion was blazing with light. Only a scattered few had assembled as yet, and there was but one small card-game going on in the front salon. But the card-men, the footmen, and the women had been ready for hours, and a French orchestra was playing in the great hall.

Lady Anne, dressed in a revealing gown of gold gauze, was everywhere, giving orders; and Ara, no longer the young schoolgirl, nor yet the mocking minx, amazed Michael by her cold efficiency and attention to business. This was a many-sided female, not the slightest doubt about it.

The Mansion was jammed by eleven, and equipages were lined up in the nearby streets. There was heavy play at the faro banks and much dancing in the great hall, which was lit now by hundreds of tall candles.

Michael wandered here and there and was bowed to by all the quality gaming or dancing, and he began to feel like a very wonderful and important fellow indeed—until he overheard a lady say: "Yes, handsome. But just an ignorant upstart from the back country, after all." For a moment Michael experienced a terrible deflation, but then finally he was able to laugh at himself, and after

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a while he was honest and level-headed enough to think: "Begob, the lady's right. I'm ignorant and from the back country (if that's anything to be ashamed of, though I doubt it), but I'm learning, ladies and gentlemen, I'm learning."

Shortly before midnight he went into the little room under the stairs, had a bite to eat and three good stiff shots of Dublin whisky, and listened to a report from DeLane, the French head card-man.

"The play is heavy, sir," said DeLane. "Table one is losing, but that's all to the good, I believe, because Lord Clayton is winning. Lord Clonmel has lost five hundred guineas at table two, but is now recouping somewhat. The house at present is a good two thousand guineas ahead, and the heaviest play is generally after midnight. I am not counting the withdrawal from the small private games, which should net by now a good three hundred guineas more."

After DeLane had gone, Ara slipped in for a moment. She'd been dancing with some of the gentlemen and was a little out of breath.

"And so," she said, as Michael neither greeted her nor made any comment at all, "Michael, of the blue-black locks, has become a great man overnight. Or at least is thought so. But I know better. May I pour a drink?"

"Help yourself."

Ara poured out a whole glass of Dublin whisky and tossed it off. "Ay—as my father always said," she went on, "I know better. Did you ever yet hear of a great man stopped of his desire by a little wooden door?"

Michael laughed curtly. "It was not my desire. If it had been, I would have kicked the lock off."

"Oh yes, yes," cried Ara, aping Michael's rather forceful way of speaking, "quite so, quite so. He's getting to be such a great fellow, and with all the ladies running after him—how could one expect him to be interested in a little Scottish girl of dubious origin?"

Michael laughed easily. "And I locked my own door, as you found out, eh, Ara?"

Ara's eyes flashed, and she burst out violently: "You are an impossible jackass, and I hope Captain Hood cuts your head off with his sabre." She stopped suddenly.

And then, almost as if on cue, there was a light tap at the door and Trim stepped in. "Captain, I thought you'd like to know. Captain Hood has arrived with Lord Bracken, and they are playing faro bank at table two. Lord Clonmel is also playing there, and losing."

"Thank you, Trim. I'll be out at once."

Trim bowed and left. Michael turned to Ara. "Well, here's your Captain Hood."

Ara glanced at him, her pretty mouth working; then she said in a low voice: "Be careful now, Mick. They say he's dangerous and very tricky."

"Tricky, is it?" cried Michael. "Girls are tricky. Cowards

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are tricky. Men are not tricky. So much for Hood." And then suddenly he stopped, realizing that Ara's whole attitude had changed and that she was warning him.

But before he could make capital of the situation or even speak, her attitude had changed again. Her black eyes were snapping angrily. "You talk like a ninny, a great baby!" she cried. "What would you be—a dead hero? Men not tricky? Doherty was the trickiest man in Dublin, and the bravest."

Michael was astounded by this outburst. "I thought you hated Doherty."

"I hated him, and I loved him," cried Ara. "Can you understand that? No, I think not. You are a woodenhead. You will be buried young."

DeLane, the head card-man, spoke to Michael in the entrance hall. "There is trouble at table two, sir. Captain Hood and Lord Clonmel have had words. It seems Hood is cheating. There is always trouble with rogues such as this. He is slipping the counters off when the card is turned. It takes dexterity; and he has it, I assure you."

Michael moved quietly and unobtrusively into the main salon and stood near an ante-room doorway, looking on at table two. The dealer was cold and impassive in his demeanour and paid no attention to the squabbling at the table. Lord Bracken was not playing, but merely watching. He was a rather pompous young man with somewhat the air of a self-satisfied pigeon. He was dressed in the most extreme French fashion and from time to time touched his nose with a lace handkerchief. Clonmel was red with annoyance, and again losing heavily. Captain Hood bucked the box with practised aplomb—and Michael saw him doing something swiftly with his hands. Clonmel lost again and danced with rage, then he turned to Hood.

"Sir, would you mind keeping your hands still while the card is being turned?"

A hush fell over the upper end of the room in the vicinity of table two. This was the thing itself. Michael moved over swiftly to the table and was just in time to prevent Clonmel from being slapped with a glove. Pivoting on his left foot, he hit Hood squarely on the jaw with his left fist, and Hood, with a look of wild surprise, went down, clashing and clanking, his long legs comically kicking the air.

There was a horrified gasp. "Ruffian!" cried Lord Bracken, raising his hand as if to strike Michael with his handkerchief, but Hood rose quickly, moved Bracken gently back, and stood confronting Michael.

"It's against my principles to fight with riff-raff," he said coldly. "But my seconds will wait on you, sir."

"Good," said Michael shortly.

"You struck me, sir, unprovoked, so no doubt you will allow me choice of weapons?"

"Suit yourself, Hood."

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" Pistols at ten paces." There was a gasp, but Michael ignored it. " Good," he said.

Hood eyed him carefully, but got nothing but a cold blue-eyed glare. " This is for blood, Martin," said Hood. " No gentlemanly nonsense, you understand."

" I understand," snapped Michael; then he turned his back on Hood and motioned for the dealer to continue.

Lord Bracken turned and left, followed in a moment by Captain Hood, who swaggered considerably now, looking about him fiercely.

The gambling went on, but Lord Clayton and Clonmel took Michael aside.

" At ten paces he can't miss, lad," cried Lord Clayton.

" Nor can I," said Michael bluntly.

Lord Clonmel laughed quietly but nervously. " He's right. In a way, it's to his advantage." He smiled reminiscently, a look of intense pleasure in his eyes. " Oh, the way he went on his back and writhed his long legs! What a punch, Martin! "

" It was only my left," said Michael solemnly, and their Lordships burst out into loud laughter, and many turned to look at them, wondering at their levity at such a time.

After the laughter had died down, Lord Clayton said: " It will be at dawn behind the University, I have no doubt, Martin. So prepare yourself."

Michael nodded slowly.

At two o'clock, Michael went into the little room under the stairs for a quick drink. Just as he was pouring it, Ara came in.

" Why did you hit him like that, Mick? " she demanded. " Did you think you were at one of your country fairs among the pigs and cattle? It's a disgraceful thing to hit a man so. A tap is enough."

" Mind your own business. A tap was all it was. I did not even split a knuckle."

" Well," said Ara, " at least you will not have to worry about the sabre. Are you a good shot? "

" Good enough. Your father taught me pistol-handling."

" Glory! " cried Ara, suddenly excited. " It's the talk of the place—of the town, I'm sure."

And then all at once Michael, seeing her so warm and excited, felt a strong desire for her and, reaching out, pulled her into his arms. She struggled vainly, laughing.

" Lord, you're strong, Mick," she whispered in his ear.

They kissed at length and then finally, taking him off guard, Ara pushed him back suddenly, tripping him, and laughing triumphantly, she ran out, slamming the door. Michael just barely saved himself from falling by grasping the edge of the table.

Furious, he rushed out and searched for her, but she had disappeared.

It was an odd tableau at the foot of the great staircase, Michael thought, as he and Clonmel and Clayton descended from an upper room. The last patron had left only a quarter of an hour ago, many

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candles were still burning in the deserted public rooms, and menservants were covering the tables and sweeping the floors. Grey was showing faintly at the windows.

Yes, an odd tableau. Lady Anne, pale as death and with a look of agonized suspense. Little DeLane, collected and correct but unusually flushed. Trim, as placid as always, effacing himself. And Ara! Her black eyes were dancing with excitement, but she seemed no more concerned than if she and Michael were leaving for a ball.

"Take me with you, Michael," she cried, grasping his forearm.

Before he could speak, Lord Clayton thrust her gently aside. "It's no place for a female, girl. What are you thinking of?"

Michael merely looked at her disdainfully. Clayton had spoken for him. Ara glanced from one to the other, then she turned on her heel suddenly and, running, disappeared into the back of the Mansion.

"A fantastic young lady," said Clonmel. "That's always been my thought."

"For the love of God, be careful," cried Lady Anne, on the verge of tears. "We've got the town in our grasp. It's greater now than even with Doherty. Don't get killed."

Michael looked at her steadily. "I'll do my best to stay alive for your sake, m'lady," he said with a laugh. She kissed him, half smothering him; then he turned and went out, followed by Clayton and Clonmel.

Trim had gone ahead and was now waiting at the coach with the driver and the boot from Nine Steps. Day was showing palely as they drove off in the direction of the University.

Hood had already arrived. He was attended by Lord Bracken and a gentleman of the name of Mr. Benchley, who, from his attitude, had been dragooned. He did not seem to approve of the proceedings at all. In the background was a small, stocky, dark-faced Italian bravo, known as Arrigo; he had narrow, slitted black eyes, and a huge sabre scar on the right side of his face, from cheekbone to chin. He did not seem to like the proceedings too well himself.

Hood tried to fix Michael with a glare, but Michael turned his back and stood looking off across the quiet precincts of the University. Strangely enough, he felt not the slightest nervousness or doubt. Doherty had prepared him, given him the measure of his man. Hood's heart was not in the right place. Michael felt vastly superior to him, contemptuous of him, even. He was certain that no such man as Hood could overcome him.

Behind him, Lord Clayton was speaking: ". . . And now, gentlemen, I must perform a routine duty. I call upon you, Captain Hood, to withdraw your challenge temporarily and submit your quarrel to arbitration by the seconds of both sides."

Michael turned. Hood, who seemed nervously truculent, was wetting his lips before he spoke. "Quite out of the question," he said, but his voice did not sound nearly as steady and harsh as he

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had intended, and Michael noted that Lord Bracken threw him a puzzled look.

And then began the business of the loading, and Michael turned away again. The sun was just rising, and he could see a small public calash driving at a smart pace up the road behind the University. It stopped, and Michael wondered who it could be, but Lord Clayton spoke to him and he turned immediately, forgetting the calash.

" And now, Captain Martin, if you are ready . . ."

Michael stripped off his coat. A few paces away, Hood was doing the same. Then they were handed the pistols and placed back to back.

" Lord Bracken, will you count? " asked Clayton.

" Yes," said Bracken, fanning himself languidly with his handkerchief. " The damned gnats are out early today, I see."

Clayton ignored the comment, the irrelevancy of which shocked both himself and Clonmel, who looked narrowly at Bracken. " The count," Lord Clayton went on, " will be as follows. One, pause. Two, pause. And so on to five. At five the gentlemen turn and fire. Is this as you see it, Captain Hood? "

Hood nodded grimly; then in a low voice, without turning, he spoke to Michael. " You are a dead Irishman, boy." Michael laughed contemptuously.

After a long, steadying pause, Lord Clayton dropped a handkerchief, cried: " Now! " and Bracken began the count. As the men paced to the count, a crow flew over them, perched in a tree, and began to caw hoarsely, as if trying to recall the odd creatures below him to their senses. This was the only sound except the inexorable counting of Lord Bracken.

Whirling suddenly, Hood beat the count of " five " by a split second, raised his pistol, fired, and Michael, taken completely by surprise, heard the sour whine of a pistol ball and felt the clammy wings of death brushing his forehead.

" Coward!" cried Lord Clayton, exploding with outrage.

" Ah, *sapristi*! " sighed Arrigo in the background. " He missed." Arrigo turned his back on the proceedings and walked slowly towards Hood's coach. As far as he was concerned, it was all over. Hood had signed his own death-warrant.

Lord Bracken screamed at Hood, " You beat the count, you scum! You've disgraced me for life. I'll never be able to hold my head up in Dublin again."

" Wait! " shouted Clonmel, coming suddenly to life. " Captain Martin still has his shot to take. Captain Martin, Hood is at your disposal."

Hood's face was greenish, and he was having great trouble keeping his long legs from trembling. " I protest! " he cried. " The count was incorrect. You threw me off balance, Bracken. I demand another try."

" Reload his pistol," said Michael.

" No, by heaven! " shouted Lord Clayton. " There will be

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none of that, lad—not with my pistols. This man deserves hanging. He tried to murder you."

Michael raised his pistol suddenly and fired it into the air. "I'll shoot no man in cold blood," he cried. "I'll fight him with sabres, clubs, or bare fists, but I'll not kill a helpless man."

Hood was in a state of near collapse, but now his eyes lit up and the colour began to return to his face, and he made a move forward as if to clasp Michael's hand, but Michael turned his back on him.

Bracken was dancing with rage. "Get out of Dublin, Hood. Tonight. Or I'll see you locked up in Dublin Castle for one reason or another."

Arrigo had hurried back and was now helping Hood on with his coat. "How could you miss?" he was hissing in a whisper. "This man was a pigeon."

Hood was staggering slightly as Arrigo led him off. "We catch a boat, I think," said Arrigo sadly.

Clonmel respectfully held Michael's coat for him. Lord Clayton was still in a state, his face an apoplectic red, and he was puffing and blowing. Lord Bracken, with tears in his eyes, seemed on the point of abasing himself.

"I hope," said Lord Bracken, "you will accept my humble apologies, Captain Martin—and I have a further hope that in the future you will allow me to refer to you as a friend."

"Why, certainly, m'lord," said Michael, bowing and shaking the hand offered him.

As they walked to the coaches, Michael noted with a start of remembrance that the calash was still in the roadway. Struck by a sudden suspicion, he excused himself and ran towards the calash. The driver went to work at once furiously, hitting his horses, cursing them, trying to get away fast, but Michael grabbed a bridle, and the driver, looking scared, subsided.

Ara put her head out of the window and shouted fiercely: "Let my driver alone, you ruffian! This is the King's highway, free to all."

Michael walked back and stood looking at her. "Well," he said, "here I am, you see. He did not cut my head off."

"No, you fool," cried Ara, "but it was close. Now maybe you will listen to me. I warned you he was tricky. But no, you knew better. Men are not tricky, you say. Only women and cowards. Well, you must deal with women and cowards. You were lucky. Just lucky."

Michael controlled himself with difficulty. Stepping back, he motioned for the driver to go ahead, and in a moment the calash bowled off. Ara leaned out and laughed jeeringly.

The three others had been looking on with amazement, and when Michael came up to them, Clonmel said: "Fantastic, that girl! I've always said so. I don't understand her at all."

"Nor do I," said Michael thoughtfully.

Michael was very glad to be in his own room now with the door

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locked. He was dead for sleep and was already sick and tired of the to-do about the " duel " with Captain Hood. Lady Anne had cried over him and kissed him and danced about the apartment like a wild young girl; and although it was but a little after eight in the morning, Bracken, Clayton, and Clonmel were drinking champagne in the drawing-room and downing one toast after another: to Michael, to Doherty (God rest him!), and to various ladies of their acquaintance.

Yawning widely, he turned over on his side and fell into a doze, but of a sudden he woke with a start. Ara! Where the devil had she got to? The last he'd seen of her, she'd been jeering at him through the window of the moving calash. Cursing, Michael got out of bed and began to walk about, pulling angrily at his hair. She hadn't come back to the apartment or he would have heard about it. Crazy, the girl was, a loon. Only eighteen, yet running around alone in a calash like a strumpet. But what was there to do? He'd only make himself ridiculous if he went out inquiring for her. " To bed, Michael," he ordered himself.

But just as he was kneeling on the edge of the bed, he heard a faint scuffling sound in the hallway, then a giggle. He went to the door and listened.

Lord Clayton's voice: ". . . but it was naughty of you, child. Duels are for men."

Lord Clayton's voice again, sickeningly coy for a man of sixty-odd: " Bye-bye, little dove. Bye."

Michael waited until Lord Clayton's rather unsteady footsteps had died away, then he opened his door cautiously and peered out. Ara, with her own door open, was looking over at his with a calculating eye. Michael smiled broadly. He'd caught her.

" Bye-bye, little dove," he called.

With a curse, Ara pulled off one of her shoes and flung it at him, missing by a couple of yards. " I dare you to come out in the hall," Ara shouted, her face twisted with rage.

" I can't," said Michael. " I have nothing on but my shirt. I dare you to come here."

Ara gave a snort of derision, went into her room, slammed the door, and shot the bolt ostentatiously.

In a moment Michael closed his own door and went back to bed. " We must have a talk," he said, " the little one and me."

And the talk came about rather abruptly and in a strange way.

The Mansion had prospered unbelievably, and as a result of this, Michael and Lady Anne had decided to keep the apartment and use it for living-quarters, rather than move to the Mansion as had been the custom in Doherty's day.

Michael liked to come home to the cosy privacy after the vast halls and crowds of the Mansion. He liked to have Ara sleeping across the hall from him, in spite of her mad antics. And he liked breakfast in bed at noon, with Trim drawing the curtains, and helping him with the tray. Princey usually jumped up on the bed

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to greet him, and then Lady Anne would come in in a beautiful négligé, her hair already arranged for the day, sit on the edge of his bed, and hold a post-mortem on the doings of the night before. Ara might look in also, with her long black hair hanging and tied carelessly with a ribbon.

Begob, it was the life of a lord! And then, one night, suddenly it was all changed!

Ara disappeared from the Mansion. Lady Anne mentioned the fact to Michael at about midnight, but they didn't really begin to worry until past three o'clock. At four, they sent Trim out to look for her.

And now the time dragged past, and Princey went to sleep in his little basket, and the coal fell in the grate, and the clocks ticked on in staggered time, and Michael fumed and fretted about the room and wondered why he was so upset over the disappearance of that little black-haired, thoughtless, heartless, mocking baggage. And finally he found the reason—at least, the reason that satisfied him and made him think somewhat better of himself. Doherty, that was it! He'd promised to protect her. That was it, clearly.

Shortly after nine, Trim came into the front hall, dragging Ara by the wrist. Her dress was torn, and she was crying and fighting at the same time. Trim's pale face was harsh in the wan light of the rainy morning.

"What's this?" cried Michael.

"Why, she run off to marry a drunken gentleman, and he jilted her, slipped out the back of the chapel. Sobered suddenly, I think."

"It's a lie," screamed Ara. "It was all a game. I had no intention of marrying the fool. But I was tired of all of you. All, all, all! Your smug faces—the gold guineas. The idiots at the tables. Is there nothing in the world but gold and lords?"

"And she's been drinking," Trim added.

"What will you do?" cried Ara. "Beat me? All right, beat me. I don't care. Lock me in my room? I'll climb down out of the window. I've done it many times to spite Doherty. I don't care what you do. There's no kindness from any of you. I hate all of you!" She burst into wild sobs and kicked at Trim.

"Such talk!" said Trim in a pained voice.

Michael felt tears at the back of his eyes. For the first time he was certain that he had gained at least a vague insight into the motives behind Ara's strange actions. "Ara, dear," he said in his kindest voice, "will you do something for me? Go to bed. Get some rest. Sleep. Later we'll talk. If you want to go away, it's all right. I'll give you the money."

Ara blinked rapidly. "But I don't want to go away, Mick. Why should I want to go away?" She began to cry. Her knees seemed to buckle, and Michael caught her just in time, lifted her, and carried her to her room.

Lady Anne appeared, with her monumental blonde hair in curl-papers. Mary followed, with the expression of an outraged monkey.

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Michael deposited Ara carefully on her large canopied bed. "Undress her, Mary," he said. "She wants sleep."

Ara kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"Well," said Lady Anne, laughing. "So it was only a runaway east by north."

Trim threw up his hands and disappeared. He wanted and needed a hot grog at Nine Steps. It had been a rough night.

Later, Michael found Lady Anne sitting by the fire in the drawing-room, concentrating on her needlework.

He sat down opposite her, and Princey came over to be patted. "You knew Doherty quite a long time, eh, Lady Anne?" he asked.

She glanced up at him and smiled slightly. "Between ourselves—though I'd never admit it to others—eighteen years."

"Why, that's indeed a long time," said Michael, surprised. "What was he like that long ago?"

Lady Anne laughed sadly. "The same. Doherty was never one to change. I met him at a ball. I was singing there. Doherty was a bravo, pretending to be a lord. I was an entertainer pretending to be a lady of title. And I'm still pretending. The name's good for business now . . . I drove off with him that night, and I remained with him."

"Ara, then," said Michael, "was just being born about that time?"

"Yes," said Lady Anne. "But that affair was nothing at all. Ara's mother was a little sad-eyed actress of the name of Alison McDonald. I'll say this for Doherty, he paid for Ara's keep from the first, though he wasn't even certain she was his own.

"Oh, there is no doubt about it now. All you have to do is look at her. She's a pocket-sized female Doherty—a devil on wheels. She's got that dark look of anger, and the mockery. You can count on it, she's a Doherty. But when I first took her to rear, there was doubt in my mind. She was quiet as a mouse—but sly as a fox. But I didn't discover the slyness till later."

"How old was she then?"

"A little past four. Doherty brought her in one day, turned her over to me, and said: 'Rear her!'—just that! So . . . I took her. The trouble started when she was about eleven. She'd run away. She'd get in fights with boys and girls, both. She tore the nice clothes Doherty bought her. Well, Doherty, as you know, was not a patient man. He whipped her soundly. Trim talked to her with tears in his eyes. It made no difference. Lock her in her room and she'd escape. One day Doherty said he'd had enough. She was making his life a hell. He'd be gone for months, as you know, and when he got back to Dublin, he'd want to relax and enjoy himself—and here'd be this young she-devil, baiting him. But after Doherty threatened her with the house of correction, she improved considerably, and she's been improving ever since—there's plenty of room."

Michael sighed. "I think Doherty was too rough with her, Lady Anne. That's my opinion."

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Now Lady Anne raised her green eyes and studied Michael's face for a long time. " I'll say this," she said, " Ara's lucky to have you taking Doherty's place. Very lucky."

Michael spent what remained of the afternoon at the Mansion, checking with DeLane, then he had a light repast in his room at six o'clock, and when he was finished, he told Trim he'd like to see Ara in the drawing-room. He'd hardly sat down beside the fire when Ara appeared, her black eyes shining with curiosity. With a laugh, she tried to sit on his knee, but Michael pushed her gently away and motioned for her to take the chair opposite him.

Ara sat down, composed herself, clasped her hands on her knees, and finally said: " That is the first time in my memory that a man has refused to take me on his knee—except Doherty, of course. When I was small, he'd brush me aside, afraid I'd ruin his fine clothes."

" Ara," Michael began, then he stopped and sat stroking his jet-black hair.

" Oh, you like yourself, don't you? " cried Ara. " You pat yourself as if you were a little dog."

Nervous, Michael lost his temper. " Did it ever occur to you," he shouted, " that you are a damned irritating girl? "

" No, it never occurred to me. But it must be true. People always end by shouting at me." Then with a change of tone: " What is it, Michael? I thought you'd changed towards me."

" What was this business about? "

" Someone wanted me to go to Paris with him. Offered me a thousand guineas and expenses . . ."

" What! " cried Michael, rising.

" Oh, sit down, hero. I've had better offers."

Michael sat down with a groan and took his head in his hands. Was he going to persist in being an idiot as he had intended?

" Michael," said Ara slowly, " will you stop thinking of me as some eighteen-year-old girl from the bog country who swoons at a kiss? Doherty was an obscene talker, and when he was going good, you could hear him all over the house. And heaven knows, Anne's no nun. That was my education. What is cheaply bought is cheaply held. That's one lesson I learnt. Whoever gets me pays heavily. And no one has got me yet—and it's not because of any of your damned virtue."

Michael stared at her in astonishment, but made no comment.

" Yes," Ara went on, " I'm held in great esteem by the lot of them because they can't have their way." She studied his face for a moment, then asked: " And what did you think I was like? What would Doherty's daughter *be* like? You knew Doherty well."

" Why did you never call yourself ' Doherty? ' "

" Because," cried Ara, her black eyes gleaming, " he never asked me to. It was always ' Araminta McDonald, a Scottish girl! ' Later he could have begged me and I wouldn't have taken his name." There was a long silence.

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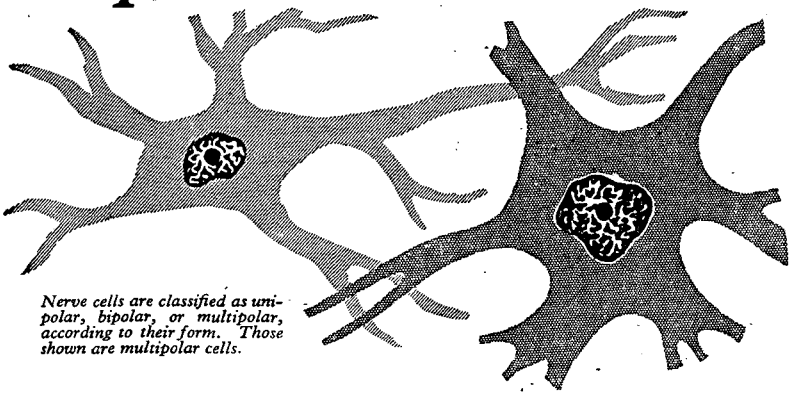

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"I am like Doherty in one thing certainly," she said. "I prefer animals to men. They are more noble, more faithful."

"You should have been reared in a convent," said Michael.

"Pity the poor Sisters!" cried Ara. Then she sobered and went on: "There is nothing wrong with the Sisters. I love them all, and perhaps they have the right of it at last. It's a dirty world, Doherty says."

There was another long silence. Then finally Ara spoke in a sweet, coy voice: "Michael, you were thinking heavily to say something. What was it?"

And Michael, taken by surprise, and like the country bumpkin he really was, blurted out: "I was thinking we might be married, the two of us."

Princey turned and looked at his mistress in surprise. She had stiffened and frozen. He tried to slip his head under her hand, but she paid no attention to the gesture at all, so he got down indignantly and went over to Michael, who, much to the little dog's surprise, was just as unresponsive. Grunting, Princey got into his basket and looked at the two of them reproachfully.

All at once Ara burst out into wild laughter. It sounded like mockery to Michael. She bounded out of her chair and disappeared. Michael stood stunned. And then he heard a hullabaloo all through the apartment, and first Mary appeared, staring wildly, then Trim in an apron, then Lady Anne, half-dressed—then Ara, like an actress making a great entrance, pushed them aside and re-entered the drawing-room, wearing Michael's hat cocked over one eye.

In all his life Michael had never before seen a girl look so attractive. She took off the hat and made a deep masculine bow, sweeping the floor with a gesture reminiscent of Doherty in a gala mood.

"Your servant for life, sir," she cried.

"Ara!" shouted Michael, grinning all over his face.

And now she rushed into his arms and burst out into loud, childish sobs.

"A brave man, that one," said Mary, turning back to the kitchen with a sigh. Later she said to Trim, who seemed stunned: "I've had three meself. Not one of them worth the powder to blow him up. And look what that fool girl gets!"

After a long, contemplative silence Trim said: "The master will sleep quiet now."

But Mary roared with laughter, and cried: "That's more than you can say for Michael, begob!"

It was one of the oddest marriages on record. The groom was pale as paper; the bride fainted at the conclusion and had to be carried from the chapel by Trim, who handled her as if she were a small, sleepy child.

Later there was a great supper at the apartment, and Lord Clayton fell down with a thump, dancing a coranto with Lady

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Anne, and Clonmel insisted on dancing a Highland fling, and making a gruesome noise with his lips which he took to be a perfect imitation of the bagpipes. And Mary grew so drunk and maudlin and obscene in her remarks that Trim had to put her to bed. Then Lady Anne took too much champagne and developed a crying jag. And suddenly Clonmel began to cry with her, to everybody's astonishment, till Bracken laughed so hard he had hysterics and had to be patted on the back and given some brandy.

Finally, Michael and Ara escaped and locked themselves in.

"Darling, I'm scared," sobbed Ara. "I know nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"You'll learn," said Michael gently.

And so the days passed, and then weeks, until finally it seemed to Michael and Ara that they had always been married.

Ara was a constant source of amazement to Michael—she was indeed, as he had thought earlier, a many-sided girl. Marriage had settled her beyond all belief, and Michael was deeply pleased to see that he had been right in regard to her and her wildness. She had never really belonged to anybody before, had never had any bona-fide status in the community. She'd had no mother and no real father, and no authentic name. But now she was a legally married woman, and the rebel in her had been replaced by the housewife. If at times it seemed that she was merely "playing house," like a charming little girl . . . well, there was nothing wrong with that; in fact, it was amusing and in a way touching.

Michael found Ara to be as loving at night as she was efficient in the daytime. But there was a difficulty about that—Ara's jealousy. She was violently—you might almost say, madly—jealous of him, and sometimes when they were lying quietly together in bed, after prolonged love-making, she would ask Michael questions with regard to all the girls he had known before he had met her.

Now Michael, a proper Irishman, had a divided soul when it came to sex; warring tendencies pulled him in opposite directions: one moment he was all for libertinage, and at other times he was remorseful over his looseness and was inclined to turn prude. He had none of Ara's frankness with regard to sex. He did not like to talk about it. It embarrassed him deeply. And laughing, he would brush off all of Ara's queries.

That was the end of the matter, except that Ara began to appear suddenly and at odd hours at the Mansion, dressed in her best and attended by Trim in livery.

Michael would look up from a conversation with one of the patrons, or one of the card-men, and there would be Ara, fanning herself grandly and looking about her as if she were the daughter of an Earl.

And one night (it was two in the morning, actually) when she arrived in the entrance hall, Michael was dancing a coranto with a somewhat drunken and *déclassée* lady—and there was hell to pay!

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ANOTHER OF **NESTLÉ'S** GOOD THINGS

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Lady Anne managed to drag Ara into the card-room, where she and Trim held her until Michael appeared, smelling strongly of Dublin whisky and grinning. Ara fell down into a chair and wept, and Trim and Lady Anne left hurriedly.

"And what is this nonsense?" cried Michael, high as a kite and exhilarated by his frolic with the amorous Miss Dawson.

Ara looked up at him, her eyes like jet buttons. "Oh, that horrible French perfume," she cried. "You stink of it."

"I noticed it was somewhat strong," said Michael, grinning. And then, to Ara's utter amazement, he broke into a wild country jig, making the music for it with his mouth, and the chairs flew over at his kicks, and Ara, half hysterical, almost collapsed with laughing; and a short while later they ran out of a side door, whooping, and Trim, chuckling to himself, drove them home through the sleeping streets of Dublin.

Michael had become quite a figure in the sporting life of Dublin, and his rise had been so sudden, so abrupt, that there was much speculation among the quality in regard to his origins.

His intimates among the quality, Bracken, Clayton, and Clonmel, were feverishly sought out by hostesses, and all three of them, night after night, held tables spellbound with highly coloured accounts of Michael's duel with the formidable Captain Hood, and Michael's silly, country-boy words: "Reload his pistol!" were made famous by constant repetition and became a sort of watchword all over the town.

Nothing like it had ever been heard of before in the whole history of duelling in Dublin—or in England or on the Continent, for the matter of that.

Full of champagne, Lord Clayton would lean back in his chair and talk for half an hour without a stop about the bravery of the very young Captain Martin, of his handsomeness, his gaiety, his wit, and his daring, while refined and sheltered ladies of quality listened with shining eyes and moist lips and wondered why it was that they could find no such man among the gentlemen of their acquaintance.

One night, Lord Clayton was extremely flattered by the interest shown in his recital by Lord Glen. Glen was a rising young man in Ireland, and already first secretary to Lord Crewe, the Lord-Lieutenant's chief adviser. He was tall, elegant, with an affable manner but a cold grey eye.

Clayton was not brilliant. And yet politically he was far from a fool, and as the effects of the champagne and the flattery began to wear off somewhat, he started to realize that Lord Glen's interest in the affairs of Captain Martin was not a polite, dinner-table, dilettante interest—it had sinister overtones. In other words, Dublin Castle, slow but sure, was beginning to recognize the presence of one so-called Captain Martin.

And old Lord Clayton was very pleased with himself for having told the probing Lord Glen nothing that might harm Michael in an official sense. Gambling was almost never interfered with

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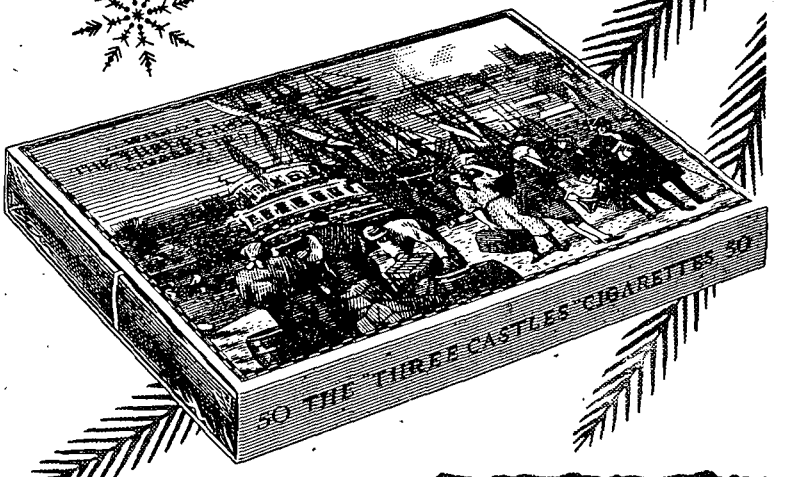

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unless there were " public nuisance " complaints by irate prominent citizens.

But this was not the end of the matter, as Lord Clayton knew it would not be. One midnight a large party appeared at the Mansion: a score of men and women, obviously of the highest fashion, and yet they came by way of public conveyances—an odd thing in itself; odder still, they all wore black lace Venetian masks, such as Doherty had worn at the robbery of Sir George Bracey. Michael was for excluding them unless they unmasked, but Lord Clayton quickly persuaded him that this would be a terrible mistake. He had recognized the chief adviser to the Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Crewe—and also Glen.

Michael was presented to the masks by Lord Clayton, and the old Lord was pleased by Michael's manners and by his unexaggerated courtesy. How the boy was learning! And Michael found himself surrounded by politely chattering and laughing, delicately scented women, looking like dressed-up elegant cats with their slitted black masks. And Michael kissed hands all around, and even permitted himself a mild heel-click or two.

Towards two, Bracken came in, roaring drunk, gave a wild start, and cried: " Good lord! It's Crewe.—What is it—a matter of state? "

" Mere curiosity, I think," said Lord Clayton, though he was far from sure, and he took Michael aside and warned him that he was now a marked man. The Castle was interested in him. He must avoid anything at all that had the faintest smack of illegality.

" It was the Hood business," cried Bracken, weaving about with a glass of champagne in his hand. " It's all over Paris, I hear."

Michael was immensely elated and could hardly wait to get home to tell Ara all about it. But Ara was more wary than himself in regard to this matter, and she said: " We must close the Mansion for a time. Doherty would have done so. I don't like this."

" Why, it will be the Lord-Lieutenant himself next," cried Michael.

" His dragoons, you mean," said Ara. " Listen to me, Michael. We must close the Mansion now."

" No, by God! " cried Michael.

" Please, Mick. Listen to me," cried Ara.

But Michael wouldn't listen.

Winter passed, then spring, and finally it was summer again, and as Michael sat in the little card-room under the stairs, checking the sheets with DeLane, he could see through the window a thin, gentle, mistlike rain falling on the well-trimmed trees of a little park across the street from the Mansion. The trees were lushly green, the atmosphere was silvery, and there was something unreal and melancholy about the look of things as the afternoon waned.

Michael went over DeLane's figures on the last sheet hurriedly, paying little attention, then he pushed the stack aside. " DeLane," he said, " are you married? "

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" Oh no, sir," the little Frenchman replied with a startled look. " Not me."

" You don't approve of marriage? "

" For others. Not for myself, sir. It's like possessions. I never own anything, only the clothes on my back. No furniture, no pictures, no books: nothing. I can lock the door of my room and leave—in five minutes' time. Go anywhere I like. No burdens, no protests."

" You may be right, DeLane," said Michael, brooding, as the little Frenchman moved unobtrusively towards the door, carrying the sheets. " Yes, you may be right. A man can clutter himself up to such an extent that he's trapped, like a pony in the bog—and the more he pulls and struggles, the deeper he gets."

DeLane went out, bowing, and noiselessly closing the door.

Always business, business, in Dublin, thought Michael with a curse. Not like Ballymoure, where business always waited while men talked their fill, as proper men should.

Michael got a bottle out of a cabinet and poured himself a drink. He knew that he was drinking more than he ought. But what in heaven's name was a man to do?

Ara? She was smothering him with her care and the petty intricacies of daily domestic life.

" I've been an ass! " cried Michael, banging his fist on the table and upsetting his drink. " At Ballymoure I was like a colt in an unfenced meadow, roaming at will. Why, there was Catherine O'Herlihy, Catherine the Dream, even! And did I think of marrying her? I did not. I wanted only to love her. I told her so. And now? " Michael rose and began to pace the floor. He felt swamped by worldly problems, he who had always been free to do as he liked and go as he pleased!

The Mansion itself, what was it but a gilded manufactory? And expensive and difficult to run, even with the help of DeLane and Lady Anne. There were card-men to pay and footmen and cooks and waiters and maids and musicians; and there were rent bills and food bills and liquor bills and bills for flowers and floor wax and candles (ye gods, the candles!) and green baize for the tables and new counters and new cards and other equipment; there were bills for livery, for horses and coaches, for drivers and boots—there were bills, bills, bills; and then there were the nights when the house lost, the largest play always being at the faro-bank tables, where the house prospered the least, percentage-wise.

Many times he'd been tempted to close the Mansion, at least for the time being; but that was exactly what both Ara and Lady Anne wanted him to do, out of caution, and so, perversely, he would not do it.

Some time later—he had a great row with Ara over nothing at all, and after a few moments of it Ara cried, " Then why did you marry me? "

Like a fool, Michael replied, " Because you are Doherty's daughter and wanted settling."

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And she ran across the hall and put herself at the mercy of Lady Anne, who was the nearest thing to a mother she'd ever had.

To Ara's great relief and delight, Lady Anne laughed at her comfortably and said: "Ara, this is nothing, nothing at all. Pay no attention to what he says in anger. He's a wild-headed young man. Loosen the rein on him and take off the curb bit. Michael's a man, Ara, not a child. Stop mothering him."

And so, in a sense, Lady Anne and Ara conspired against Michael; but it did not work out quite as they had expected.

Michael misunderstood. It could be raining pitchforks and still Ara made no mention of his wearing a heavy coat. She no longer appeared at the Mansion at odd hours; in fact, she no longer appeared there at all, and never spoke of it at home. She did not even notice his drinking at table, which had seemed to annoy her so at first—wine, yes; but not raw spirits.

Michael, perversely, felt abandoned.

And then one night Big Tom appeared, in great agitation, at

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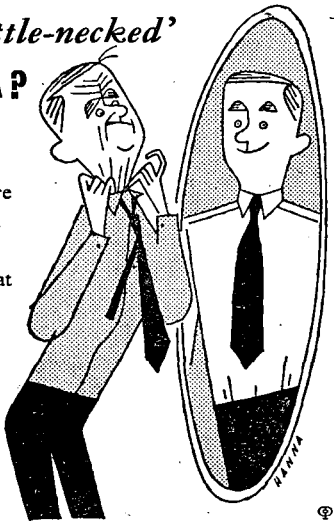

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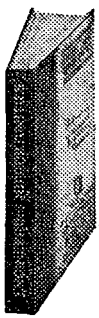

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the servants' entrance of the Mansion. He insisted he must have a hurried word with Captain Martin. They went in together.

"Captain," said Big Tom, "I know I shouldn't be coming here. These are bad times, Captain. Trouble, trouble in the back country, and even in Dublin. I took every precaution—but I had to come here to bring you an urgent warning . . ."

★ ***The third and last part of W. R. Burnett's "Captain Lightfoot" appears in next month's Argosy on sale December 10.***

Brilliant new Science Fiction Choice by ROBERT SHECKLEY—in next month's ARGOSY

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 16

We are pleased to announce the five winners of Argosy's sixteenth Prize Crossword Competition:—

R. A. Allan Esq., Guest Road, Upton, Poole, Dorset.
Miss Veronica R. Beacham, Park Avenue, Whitchurch, Cardiff.
D. F. Collins Esq., Rockfield East, Dundee.
P/O J. Goodson, H.M.S. Rinaldo, c/o G.P.O., London.
Miss J. Thorburn, Murray Street, Duns, Berwickshire.

These readers who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Quail.* 4, *Mandates.* 8, *Averages.* 10, *Estate.* 12, *Teach.* 13, *Detergent.* 14, *Racer.* 16, *Roundelay.* 17, *Dirt-cheap.* 19, *Lorry.* 21, *Poulterer.* 22, *Motor.* 24, *Social.* 25, *Cynosure.* 26, *Treasure.* 27, *Noses.*

Down. 1, *Quarter.* 2, *Arena.* 3, *Leather.* 5, *Desired.* 6, *Traveller.* 7, *Sweetly.* 9, *Elderberry.* 11, *Stout party.* 15, *Carbuncle.* 17, *Deposit.* 18, *Cutlass.* 19, *Lampoon.* 20, *Yorkers.* 23, *Tours.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 19

Argosy's nineteenth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first five correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 19), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp), to arrive by Thursday, December 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale February 10th, 1955.

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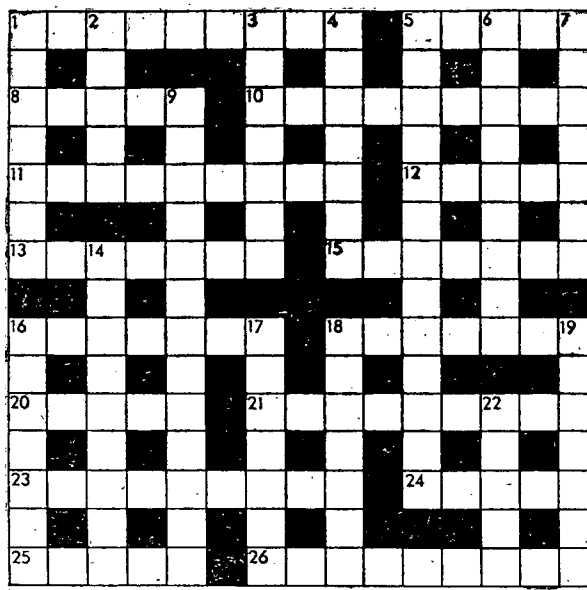
PRIZE CROSS WORD

No. 19

★

Rules of Entry on Page 143

★



BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

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Address .....

A.19 .....

CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 This degree suggests that its possessor has been fed (9).

5 Black and sticky, but essential to the cricketer (5).

8 My turn with the cards : it's something to aim at (5).

10 Fruity illumination in the theatre (9).

11 Flimnap held this post in Lilliput (9).

12 " Bring the —— primrose that forsaken dies " (Milton) (5).

13 Answered—but, in the end, untruthfully (7).

15 The backward engineer digs for these valuable quadrupeds (7).

16 Gray situated Pleasure at this (3, 4).

18 The islander loses his head and turns to abuse (7).

20 Have a care for the nut ! (5).

21 Shut Ely or it may go in this direction (9).

23 An exemplary fish showing off clothes (9).

24 Become entangled—or a French composer (5).

25 Obviously the aristocrat of cricket-grounds (5).

26 Carve thoroughly but peevishly (9).

Down

1 This ship doesn't seem likely to get anywhere (7).

2 Creep crookedly to get a dress material (5).

3 Are dull letters transformable into something that was attractive ? (7).

4 " The lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf Round the —— bole " (Browning) (3-4).

5 Bunyan's Christian was this kind of American (7, 6)

6 Get hit, Ned, in straitened circumstances (9).

7 Vicious spots to be found beneath electric blankets ? (7).

9 Hugo's down-and-outs sound a gloomy lot. (3, 10).

14 Bonnie Prince Charlie was a young one (9).

16 Confine ; as in a street-car, perhaps (7).

17 Mother's little quarrel has a canine outcome (7).

18 To do this is illegal, though it looks virtuous to begin with (7).

19 Sovereign payment to an author ? (7).

22 Jack Absolute was his own (5).

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